TWO ADDITIONAL PAGES THIS ISSUE!

STARTLING STORIES

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A THRILLING PUBLICATION

THE MICROSCOPIC GIANTS
A Hall of Fame Classic
By PAUL ERNST

THE Mask OF CIRCE
An Astonishing Novel
By HENRY KUTTNER

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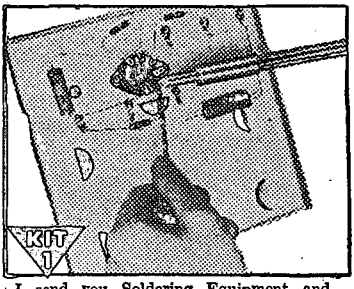

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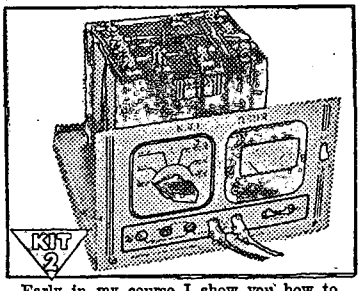

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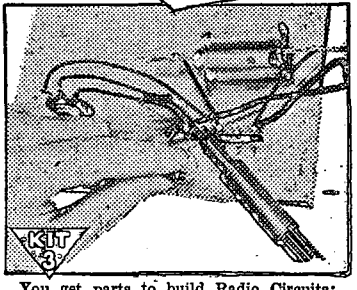

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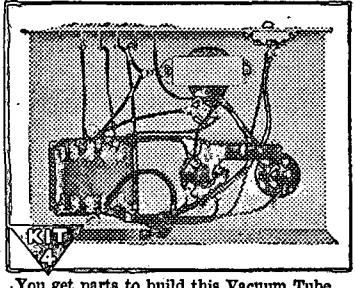

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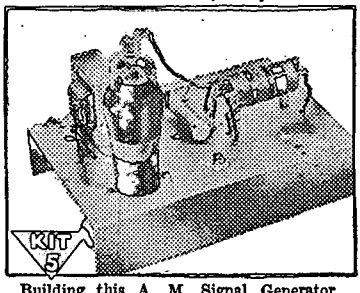

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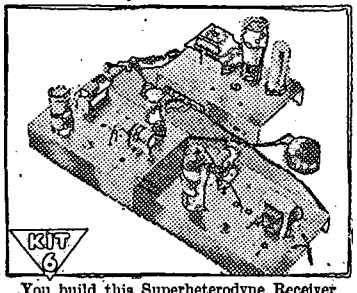

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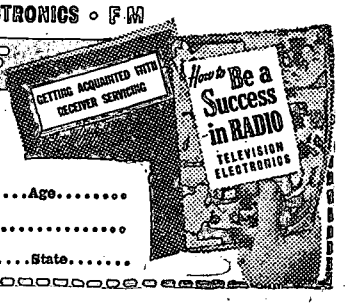

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STARTLING STORIES

Vol. 17, No. 2 | A THRILLING PUBLICATION | May, 1948

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Summoned by luring voices from the past, Jay Seward assumes the role of Jason in an epochal journey to the fabulous land of the legends! 11

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Six Short Stories

THE SIMPLE LIFE.....Ray Cummings 61
Professor Hubert Blaine and his wife flee into outer space

THE HOUSE OF RISING WINDS.....Frank Belknap Long 70
The hunter arrives to teach Jimmy to combat a deadly game

THE SEEKERS.....Robert Moore Williams 92
A refugee from Earth warns the spaceship crew of grim Martian weapons

JOURNEY.....George O. Smith 101
Nobody believes Ted Murray when he claims he's been to Alpha Centauri

THE MICROSCOPIC GIANTS.....Paul Ernst 108
A Hall of Fame Classic reprinted by popular demand

AFTER THE ATOM.....John Russell Fearn 117
Dr. Salsback believes he holds the vital secret of preserving peace

Special Features

THE ETHER VIBRATES.....The Editor 6

SCIENCE FICTION FAN PUBLICATIONS.....A Review 139

Cover Painting by Earle Bergey—Illustrating "The Mask of Circe"

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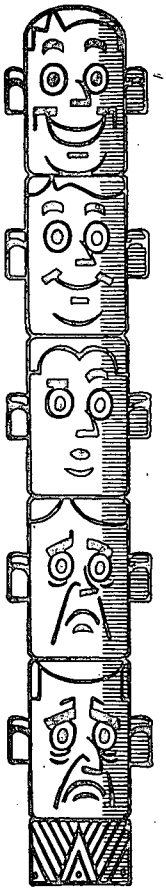

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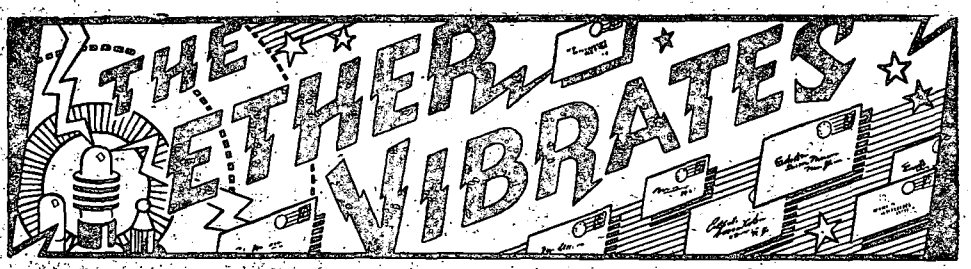

THERE is a certain type of letter which this department frequently receives (and often publishes) and which its readers will readily recognize—a type of letter which has caused us to engage in a curious line of thought where science fiction is concerned.

It is a type of letter that can, in view of the avowed purpose of science fiction to keep in general far ahead of its current time in concept and execution, be only termed conservative. The frequency with which it turns up in both mail and column alike and the literacy and intelligence with which it is usually expressed have caused us to ponder upon the true role of the conservative, in science fiction and everything else.

Usually its author is engaged in feeling outrage or disappointment with a pseudo-scientific premise expressed by one of our authors. Because this premise is at variance with known scientific laws, he refuses to accept the story as "honest" and, frequently by means of elaborate equations or physical theorems, sets out to prove his point.

Fact and Fancy

Naturally, from his point of view, he does so. He errs, of course, in confusing pseudo-science with the real thing. When George O. Smith or Murray Leinster sets down a formula for the development of matter transfer or faster-than-light travel through hyper-space (whatever that is), he is basing his premise upon a credible surmise of something that *might* be—not something that is.

He can be a very annoying fellow indeed to anyone whose imagination runs along more fanciful lines—yet it is our idea that he fulfills a highly useful function and deserves gratitude. He has a fine way of making his occasionally over-imaginative brethren haul in sail.

In short, he plays the true role of a conservative—that of a sea anchor upon the more radical mind. And, in science fiction as in everything else, he is very much present and accounted for.

That he functions on logic does not make him worthy of derision. For, within a pattern of limited causation, logic at times works very well indeed. We should not have developed much of a civilization, industrial, scientific or cultural, had our ablest minds discarded logic entirely because it is invariably faulty outside of its given sphere.

Logic vs. Theory

Anyone who has dabbled in philosophy knows the futility of reasoning on a basis of cause and effect. Sooner or later he finds himself back at ultimate cause—yet ultimate cause must invariably, if logic is correct, be the effect of some beyond ultimate cause which obviously cannot be. It is possessed of more than passing kinship to the oldie about the chicken and the egg.

Your logician, however, dismisses philosophy as abstruse fiddle faddle. What he wants to know about anything is—does it work? If it does, whatever its discrepancies, it satisfies him. He accepts it and bases his subsequent reasoning upon the fact as proof of logic.

Your born theoretician, on the other hand, will go on tearing his hair because a machine, rocket, star pattern or whatnot, does not function according to theory—he'll snatch himself bald until new theory or a whole new set of same are developed to cover the discrepancy.

Without the logician of practical cast, whatever his imaginative short-comings, we would be a very backward world indeed. Without the creative theoretician, on the other hand, we would have small hope for a progressive future. So radical and conservative balance one another along interlocking parallels (a concept we'll leave to our theoreticians to work out).

The chief hitch in such relationship is that radical and conservative can be counted upon to generate mutually harmful distrust almost upon sight. The conservative thinks of anyone eager for a change as criminally destructive of life as it exists. The radical, on the other hand, considers the conservative as

(Continued on page 8)

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You Can Influence Others With Your Thinking!

TRY IT SOME TIME. Concentrate intently upon another person seated in a room with you, without his noticing it. Observe him gradually become restless and finally turn and look in your direction. Simple—yet it is a *positive demonstration* that thought generates a mental energy which can be projected from your mind to the consciousness of another. Do you realize how much of your success and happiness in life depend upon your influencing others? Is it not important to you to have others understand your point of view—to be receptive to your proposals?

Demonstrable Facts

How many times have you wished there were some way you could impress another favorably—*get across to him or her your ideas*? That thoughts can be transmitted, received, and understood by others is now scientifically demonstrable. The tales of miraculous accomplishments of mind by the ancients are now known to be fact—not fable. The method whereby these things can be *intentionally*, not accidentally, accomplished has been a secret long cherished by the Rosicrucians—one of the schools of ancient wisdom existing throughout the world. To thousands everywhere, for centuries, the Rosicrucians have privately taught this nearly-lost art of the practical use of mind power.

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THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Continued from page 6)

against nature, which must always either progress or move backwards. Each, we believe, is as guilty as the other.

Science fiction stories must retain at least plausibility in theory to be effective (we are excluding fantasy from this discourse since those who like it and those who can't abide it come almost equally from both camps). If its premises become to improbable it becomes fantasy—and usually poor fantasy at that, since fantasy demands a highly specialized approach.

It is the patient, if occasionally irate, orthodox thinker who keeps on writing intelligent letters to columns like this that does perhaps more than anyone else to maintain that plausibility. So we're for him as we are for more elements.

As the late Sir W. S. Gilbert (of Gilbert and Sullivan fame) had the sentry sing in IOLANTHE—

> For every gal and every boy
> That's born into this world alive
> Is either a little Liberal
> Or else a little Conservative.

We suspect he hit it on the nose. So be it!

OUR NEXT ISSUE

THE novel in the July issue of STARTLING STORIES is handled by one of the great masters of stf, Edmond Hamilton, who has written one of his finest long stories in THE VALLEY OF CREATION. It should make his first appearance in the lead-story spot of this magazine, since the memorable STAR OF LIFE last year, a memorable one.

Eric Nelson is one of a strange group of soldiers of fortune, a group comprising Holland Dutchmen Piet Van Voss, Lefty Wister, a little Cockney, Nick Sloan, a man of chilled steel and Li Kin, a Chinese. Sloan, like Nelson, hails from America but is a much rougher customer.

All five of the ill-sorted comrades are at rope's and wit's end when Li Kin discovers that a Chinese Government column has cut them off, together with the rest of insurgent General Yu Chi Chan's defeated army, in western China. Jetsam of World War Two, Eric and his mates are renegades even among renegades.

It is then that the summons reaches them—

(Continued on page 126)

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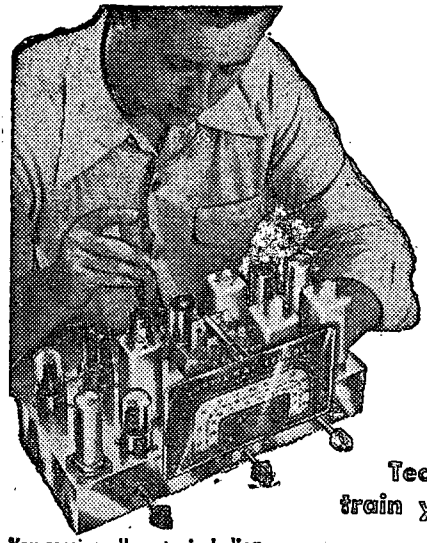

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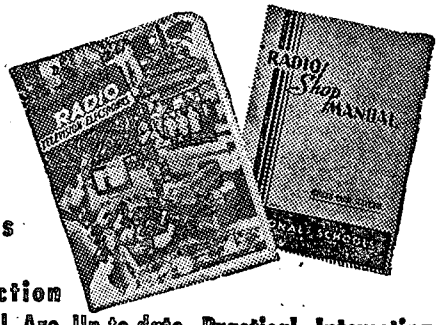

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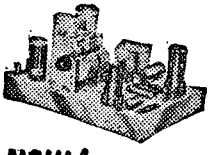

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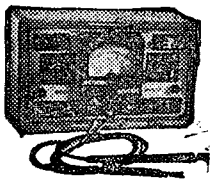

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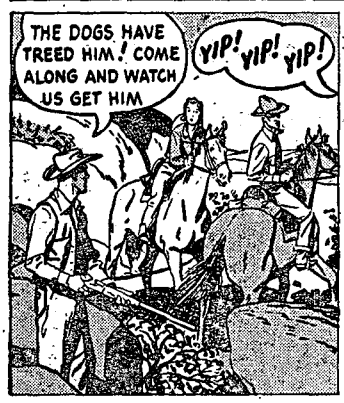
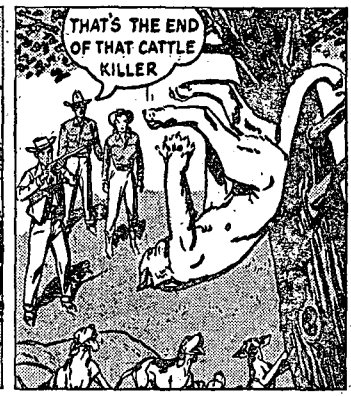
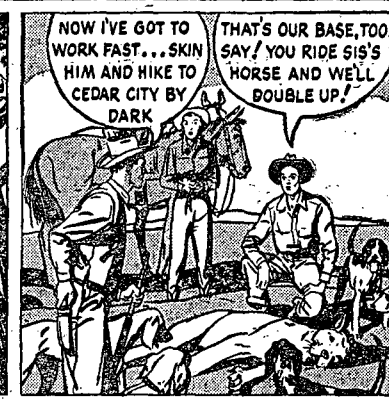
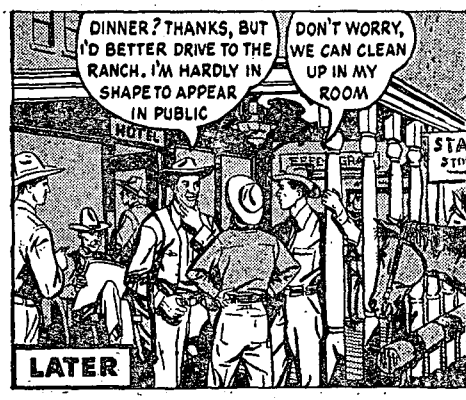
LADY MEETS LION AND THEN . . .

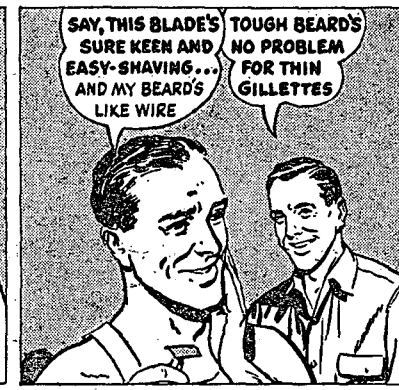
SALLY BRETT AND HER BROTHER JOE, ARE JUST TURNING HOMEWARD AFTER A DAY-LONG RIDE IN STATE CANYON FOREST WHEN . . .








DINNER? THANKS, BUT I'D BETTER DRIVE TO THE RANCH. I'M HARDLY IN SHAPE TO APPEAR IN PUBLIC
DON'T WORRY, WE CAN CLEAN UP IN MY ROOM
HOTEL
LATER



I SURE WISH YOU'D ACCEPT. THERE'S PLENTY OF ROOM AT THE RANCH AND . . .
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I'D LOVE IT
HE'S SO HANDSOME!

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a novel by Henry Kuttner

the MASK *of* Circe

Summoned by luring voices from the past, Jay Seward assumes the role of Jason in an epochal journey to the fabulous land of the legends!

CHAPTER I

Enchanted Seas

TALBOT drew on his pipe and squinted across the campfire at the face of the man who was speaking softly, slowly, the words coming one upon another in the patterns of the strangest tale Talbot had ever heard.

Jay Seward's face was bronze in the flickering firelight. It might have been a mask hammered out of metal, with the tall Canadian pines a background and the moonlight silvering it with strange highlights. They were far away from civilized places, these

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two, and the tale Jay Seward told might have sounded wildly improbable in more prosaic surroundings. But here and now, it did not seem strange at all. . . .

Jay Seward had been restless all that day. Talbot, who had known him only a week, was more and more aware as time went by that his companion was somehow a haunted man. He seemed to be waiting for something—watching for something. He kept his head turned a little, whatever else he did, so that the sounds of the sea down at the foot of the pine slope were always clear in his ears, as though he expected some other sound than the splashing of the waves.

But it was not until an hour ago, after sunset, sitting by the campfire, that at last he began to talk.

"This isn't real," Seward declared suddenly, glancing around the moon-drenched clearing. "I feel as if I'd stepped back in time a year. I was up here just a year ago, you know. I was a pretty sick man. Then something happened, and—" He did not finish, but you could see his thoughts move off along a familiar trail of remembering.

Talbot said, "It's a good country to get well in." He spoke cautiously, hoping not to break the spell of Seward's thinking. He was very curious about this man; he wanted to hear the tale he felt sure was coming.

Seward laughed. "My mind was sick. And I couldn't stay away from the ocean." He turned his head a little and his nostrils flared as if he tried to draw into his lungs the deepest savor of the salt wind that moved through the pines. A faint thunder of breakers came with it, and Seward stirred restlessly.

"I was drowning," he said simply. "Drowning in an unknown ocean that touched—strange shores. Do you mind if I talk? I think it'll bring everything back clearer—and I want to bring it back. Tonight I don't understand it—tonight something's going to happen. Don't ask me what. If I told you you wouldn't believe me. And I won't make apologies for—for what I *know* happened. I'm not out of my head—I never have been. I *know*—" He paused and laughed, faintly apologetic.

"Go on," Talbot said, drawing on his pipe. "I'd like to hear it, whatever it is."

"If you don't mind a long story, I will. Maybe it'll help." He glanced at the mist wreathing among the pines. "It was like that on Aeaea," he said. "Always—misty. Veiled."

"Aeaea?"

"The Isle of the Enchantress." He shrugged impatiently. "All right, I'll tell you."

SEWARD shifted a little so that his back was against a fallen log and his face to the darkness that hid the ocean. In a slow voice he began to talk.

"Three years ago I was in the States, working with a man named Ostrend on a new type of psychiatric research. That's my line—psychiatry. Ostrend was a wonderful man in his field—*blast him!*

"It was the sodium pentathol narcosynthesis that started us off—and we went too far. Ostrend was a genius. Before we finished we'd crossed the boundaries of known psychological research and—" Seward broke off, hesitated, and began again.

"Narcosynthesis is a new method of exploring the brain. You know the principle? Under a hypnotic the patient is forced to look back on his own crises, things buried in his unconscious mind—the unpleasant things he doesn't want to remember consciously. The catharsis usually brings about a cure.

"Ostrend and I went farther than that. I won't tell you the methods we used. But we were, alternately, our own guinea pigs, and the day we succeeded, I was the specimen on the slide. . . .

"Crises buried in the past—how far back? What I remembered—Ostrend made a transcript of it as he questioned me. I didn't know what was happening till I woke. But after that the memories came back. Even if I hadn't read Ostrend's record, I'd have remembered. A crisis buried far in the past, dredged up out of my subconscious.

"It should have stayed there, buried! Narcosynthesis is a fine and useful psychiatric treatment, but we reached beyond the normal limits. Ancestral memories, transmitted through the genes and chromosomes from my ancestors down through my lineage until I inherited them.

"Latent memories of one of my ancestors—a man who has become a myth. Who may never have existed.

"Yet I know he existed. He lived, in a time and world so long ago that nothing but legends remain now. And he went through a crisis there that was ineradicably impressed

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on his mind—and buried in his unconscious.

"A memory he passed down to his sons, and his son's sons.

"A memory of a voyage—in a ship manned by heroes, with Orpheus at the prow. Orpheus, whose lyre could raise the dead—

"Orpheus—who is a myth today. Like the other heroes who went on that great, fabulous voyage—

"My memories went back and back to time's dawn.

"I was Jason!

"Jason—who sailed in the *Argo* to Colchis and stole the Golden Fleece from the sacred serpent-temple, where scaled Python guarded that shining treasure of the god Apollo. . . .

"The memories did not pass. They stayed with me. I seemed to have two minds. Things I could never have heard or noticed as Jay Seward I heard and saw after that narcosynthetic treatment. The sea called me. I—I heard a voice sometimes. It wasn't calling Jay Seward. It was calling Jason, Jason of Iolcus, Jason of the *Argo*. And I was Jason. At least, I had his memories.

"Some of them. Shadowy, confused—but I remembered many things from the life of that ancestor of mine. And some of those things, I knew, could never have existed on this old Earth of ours. Not even in the enchanted seas of the Argonauts.

"The conch shell of Triton seemed to summon me. Where? Back to that forgotten past? I didn't know. . . .

"I tried to get away. I tried to break the spell. It was impossible to continue my work, of course. And Ostrend couldn't help me. No one could. I came up here as a last resort over a year ago. In the train, out of Seattle, I thought for a while that I'd got away.

"But I hadn't. Up here, a year ago, I heard that soundless call from the sea—and thought of ghosts and ghostly ships. I was afraid. Terribly afraid. I slept under the pines, and the wind brought to me the crack of sails in the wind, the creak of oarlocks.

"And it brought the sound of a sweet, inhuman voice that called, 'Jason! Jason of Thessaly! Come to me!'

"That night I answered the call. . . ."

I STOOD on a rocky ledge jutting out above the swirl of waters. My memory was cloudy and confused. I could remember tossing uneasily in my sleeping-bag. I could

Slowly Circe lifted the mask with both hands—lifted it free and raised it high (CHAPTER III)

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remember hearing the wild, faint humming of tuned strings and a strange murmur that was not a voice—yet I knew what spoke. It was not the call that summoned Jason by name.

No, this was very different.

I was standing above the water. The fog had come down, smothering and silent. The moon must still have been high, for a silver radiance filtered through the mist, and beneath me washed the sea, dark and filigreed white with foam.

Very dimly I heard the sighing of strings and that alien murmuring from the fog. I knew the murmur. It was—the *Argo's* keel, speaking in a voice none but a seer could understand.

Something moved out there on the water, hidden by fog. I heard oarlocks creak. Slowly, slowly a shape swam into view. First I saw the great square of the sail, hanging limp against the high mast, and then, shadowy in that unearthly light, I saw the prow sweep toward me.

Out of the fog the ship loomed—driving toward the jut of rock where I stood. One instant it rushed past beneath me, the decks not eight feet away, the mast towering above me as it dipped landward. I saw the oars go up in unison to avoid snapping off against the rock.

There were figures on the benches—on the deck. Unreal figures. One held a lyre. The music swept out from that in rhythmic echoes.

But more urgent still was the wordless voice that bubbled from the *Argo's* keel as the ship plunged on beneath me.

The memories of Jason surged up in my mind. Coldness and the shuddering sweat that always accompanied that wave of recollection swept chillingly over me. Jason—Jason—I was Jason!

As the ship rushed past I sprang out, with all my strength, toward those ghostly decks sliding away below. They were solid planks I struck. My knees buckled. I fell and rolled, and then sprang up instantly, staring about me.

The shore had already vanished. Only the silver mists surrounded the ship, luminous with moonlight.

Jason? No, I was not Jason. I was Jay Seward—I—

Realization, volition, came back to me terrifyingly.

I knew what it was I had done—or had seemed to do—and I knew this was either a dream, or madness.

CHAPTER II

Mystic Ship

BENEATH my feet the deck felt real. The salt spray tasted of brine; the wind that flung it in my face was a real wind. And yet I knew there was about this incredible ship something wildly unreal.

For I could see the rowers below me, and through them I could see the long pale swelling of the waves. Every muscle of those bending backs was clear as they leaned to the oar-pull, but clear in the way a dream might be in the instant of awakening. The oarsmen did not see me. Their faces were set with the strain of the work they bent to, skillfully driving toward—what goal?

I stood there dazed for a moment, peering about me into the mist, balancing to the roll of the ship with a deftness not my own, as if my body had slipped smoothly into even the physical and muscular memories of another body, as my brain had meshed memories with another brain.

Except for the noises of the ship herself there was no sound around me. I heard the slap of waves against the prow, the creak of timber, the rhythmic song of oars against their locks. I could hear clearly the music of that lyre on the arm of the shadowy figure in the prow. But the men were voiceless.

I remember how the hair lifted on my head when I first saw a translucent warrior throw back his bearded chin and bellow out a song that swept from rower to rower along the benches until the double ranks swayed to a single rhythm and the hand of the lyrist swept his strings to lead them—in silence.

The music I could hear; the men were ghosts.

The sound of my own voice startled me. All my bewilderment and the deep, stirring terrors that had been moving at the back of my brain seemed to crystallize suddenly in the shout I gave.

"Who are you?" I roared at the voicelessly singing oarsmen. "Answer me! Who are you?"

My own voice rolled back to me out of the mist as if from a ghostly sounding-board.

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Panyr lay back upon the turf and laughed at me, bellowing with merriment (CHAPTER IV)

"*Who are you—are you—are you?*. And I knew I could no more reply than the oarsmen could. Who was I, indeed? Jay Seward, Doctor of Medicine? Or Jason son of Aeson, King of Iolcus? Or a ghost on a ghostly ship, manned by—what? I shouted again, an angry, wordless cry, and leaped down to the nearest galley bench, reaching to seize the shoulder of the oarsman nearest me.

My hand shot helplessly through empty air. The oarsmen sang on.

I don't know how long it was I raged up and down the galley benches, shouting to the heedless singers, dashing my fists through their unreal bodies, trying in vain to wrench the oars from those misty hands that would not yield an inch to all my tugging.

I gave it up at last and climbed back onto the raised central deck, panting and bewildered. The shadowy man at the prow still swept the lyre-strings in a strangely ringing melody, oblivious to me as his companions were. The same breeze lifted my hair and tossed the pale curling beard of the lyrist, but I might have been the ghost and he the reality for all the heed he paid me. I reached for his wrist to halt the music, and his wrist passed through my fingers like the breeze.

I touched the harp. Like the relentlessly plying oars, the harp was real. I could touch it, but I could not move it. Even the strings were rigid to my hand, though they vibrated with wild, strange music to the lyrist's touch.

I said, "Orpheus—Orpheus?" in an uncertain voice, remembering who it was who had stood at the prow of *Argo,* and yet unsure of myself when I spoke his name. For Orpheus, if he ever lived at all, must have been dead for more than three thousand years.

He did not hear me. He played on; the rowers toiled, the ship slid forward through the mist. She at least was real, alive with that strange life all ships share, breathing with the motion of plank on plank as the seas

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lifted her. Out of my memories of the past I knew Jason's old love for his ship—Jason's only love, I thought, despite his many lighter loves for womankind. Jason was a strange man while he lived, blind in so many ways, ruthless, ready to betray all who trusted him in his grim pursuit of his goal. But to *Argo* herself he was faithful all his life—and in the end it was *Argo* who slew him.

HER bubbling voice, not for my ears, spoke mysteriously between the waves and the decks. She was more than ship as she drove on toward—toward whatever end my fate and Jason's had decreed. And then as if the mist itself were answering my wonder, the silvery blindness parted before me and I saw—

Sunlight struck down upon the water and turned it to a dark and dazzling blue. A long row of blinding white breakers dashed themselves high against the marble walls of—an island? A castled island, fortified down to the very brink of the sea, and lifting white towers against a sky as blue as the water. All white and deep dark blue was that scene unveiled before me.

"This isn't out of our time," I thought, staring. "It can't be. This is something seen through the lens of legend—wine-dark waters and encastled shores like something Euripides might have written millenniums ago."

The mists drew farther back, and it was not an island but a long peninsula, walled to the water's edge and separated from the mainland by a mighty wall that reared its bulk like a tower into the blue air. For a moment the scene lay motionless before me, without life, a city of legend.

Then I heard trumpets and there was a sudden stirring along the walls. Voices echoed across the water. The *Argo* swept forward parallel with the shore. I thought the rhythm of the lyre had quickened a little. There was uneasiness in it now, and the oarsmen bent to their work with a swifter stroke.

The trumpets roared louder. I caught the distinct clashing, as of weapons against shields, and suddenly out from beyond the seaward tip of the promontory a blinding vessel swept. She was all gold. The eye could not look upon her directly in that blaze of sunlight. But in my first glimpse before I had to screen my gaze I saw the double rows of oars flashing along her sides as she swept toward us, water foaming away from her dazzling prow.

The music of Orpheus' lyre was a wild alarm now. Rhythm beat fast upon rhythm until the oars of the *Argo* were pumping like the beats of a quickened heart. Swifter and swifter we flew over the water, that tower-walled promontory sweeping away past us and behind us, shouts from the golden ship echoing over the distance between.

She was a bireme, with twice the power of ours, but she was heavier in proportion and the *Argo's* hull slipped over the water with a lightness that touched my heart somewhere at a point where it was Jason's heart answering to the beauty and the swiftness of his beloved ship.

The city fell astern. We were running through mist again, but the outlines of wooded shores and low hills loomed up alongside now and fell behind again as the *Argo* answered the beat of her ghostly rowers. And ever behind us the bellow of horns rolled out upon the fog and the golden ship at our stern blazed even through the mists between us.

It was a close race, and a very long one. Not until nearly at the end of it did I know what our goal was. Then out of the fog the cypress island loomed, low-shored, edged with white beaches, and the dark trees brooding down to the edge of the pale sand. Jason knew the island.

"Aeaea," his memory murmured in my brain. And subtle fears stirred with it. "Aeaea, Island of the Enchantress."

From astern the cries of the pursuers were as loud as they had been at the beginning of the chase, hours ago now. The clashings of their weapons were like the clash of metallic teeth in a dragon's jaws, stretched to devour us. When the golden ship's lookout sighted the cypress trees in the fog he must have signaled for redoubled speed, for I heard the sharp crack of whips, and the blinding vessel fairly leaped forward. She was overhauling us fast, though Orpheus' disembodied lyre screamed out in rhythms that made the pulses pound in answer, and the ghostly oarsmen bent their sinewy backs desperately over the oars.

For one flashing moment the golden ship stood almost alongside, and I could look with half-blinded eyes across her shining decks and see the men in shining armor that matched their ship, straining across the rails and shaking swords and javelins at us.

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Then she sprang ahead. There was an instant when the blaze of her blotted out that dark island before us. Suicidally she shot across our bows, and I could see the tense, excited faces of her crew turned toward us, pale against the dazzle of their shining mail.

Orpheus' lyre broke the rhythm of the stroke for one heartbeat. Then the shadowy fingers swept those magical strings and a scream of hatred and vengeance leaped from the lyre. It shrieked like a living thing, like a Fury ravening for the kill.

All around me I saw the voiceless shout of answer sweeping the *Argo's* crew. I saw the bearded heads go back, grinning with effort and triumph, and I saw the brawny backs bending as one in a last tremendous pull that shot their craft forward—forward straight into the golden side looming before us.

For one heartbeart I realized vividly how vulnerable I was—I alone, among all this bodiless crew to whom destruction could mean nothing. *Argo* and I were real, and the golden ship was real, and the ghostly Argonauts were driving us both to what looked like certain doom.

I remember the terrific, rending crash as we struck. The deck jolted beneath me and there was a blaze ahead as if the golden ship were incandescent and flashing into flame with its own brilliance in that moment of disaster. I remember shouts and screams, the clash of weapon on shield, and above it all the wild, shrill keening of lyre-strings swept by no mortal hands.

Then *Argo* fell apart beneath me and the cold seas met above my head. . . .

CHAPTER III

Temple in the Grove

A VOICE was calling through billows of thinning mist. "Jason of Iolcus," it cried very sweetly in my dreams. "Jason of Thessaly—Jason of the *Argo*—waken—waken and answer me!"

I sat up on the pale, cool sand and listened. Waves lapped a shore still marked with the track where I must have dragged myself out of the placid surf. My clothes were stiff with brine, but dry. I must have lain here a long while.

The dark cypress trees rustled secretly together, hiding whatever lay behind them. There was no other sound. No sign of survivors from the golden ship, no sign of the ship itself. The *Argo* I had last felt shattering asunder beneath my feet might have returned with its ghostly crew to the land of ghosts for all I could see of it now. I was alone on the pale sands of Aeaea, which was the Enchantress' Isle.

"Jason of the *Argo*—answer me, come to me—Jason, Jason! Do you hear?"

The voice had a clear, inhuman sweetness, as if the island itself were calling me by name. And the call was compelling. I found myself on my feet, and swaying a little, without knowing I had risen. The summons seemed to come from between the cypresses directly at my back. I floundered up the sand and plunged into the grove, only partly of my own volition, so sweetly compelling was that cry from the misty depths of the isle.

I could see only a little way ahead, for the fog seemed to hang in veils among the trees. But I thought that I was no longer alone. There was deep silence all around me, but a listening and watching silence. Not inimical—not menacing. Interested—that was it. Detached interest watched me on my way through the mist-drenched grove, eyes that followed me aloofly, not caring, but interested to see what my fate would be.

In that silence punctuated by the dripping of mist and moisture from the trees, and by no other earthly sound, I followed the calling voice through fog and forest, to the very heart of the island.

When I saw the white temple looming against the dark trees I was not surprised. Jason had been here before. He knew the way. Perhaps he knew who called, but I did not. I thought when I saw the face of the speaker, I would not feel surprised either, but I could not picture her yet.

Motion stirred among the pillars of the temple as I crossed the misty clearing. Robed and veiled figures came out from the shadow of the columns and bent their hidden heads in greeting. No one spoke. I knew, somehow, perhaps with Jason's age-old knowledge, that while that voice called from the temple, no one on the island must speak but the Voice itself—and I?

"Jason of Thessaly," the voice was saying in a low, caressing cadence. "Jason, my

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lover—enter! Come to me, Jason, my beloved."

The robed figures stepped back. I went under the shadow of the portico and into the temple.

Except for the flame that moved restlessly upon the altar, it was dark here. I could see a tall triple image looming up majestic and terrible behind the fire, and even the fire was strange, burning greenish, with a cold flickering cadence, and its motion more like the ceaseless, uneasy twisting of serpents than the warm flicker of ordinary firelight.

The woman before the altar was completely robed, like the others. I thought she moved with an odd sort of stiffness in her concealing garments. At the sound of my foot on the marble she swung around, and when I saw her face I forgot for a timeless moment her curious slowness of movement, and the altar fires, and even the identity of that triple figure above us, whose dark import I knew well.

It was a pale face, inhumanly pale and smooth, like a face of alabaster. There was the purity of alabaster in the long, sloping planes of the cheeks and the modeling of the eye-sockets and the delicately flattened brow. But a warmth burned beneath the smoothness, and the lips were dark red and warmly full. And the eyes burned with a lambent flame as green and strange as the strange fire on the altar.

Black brows swept in a winged arc above them in a look of delicate surprise, and her hair was glossily black, lustrous with purple highlights, dressed elaborately in a stately display of ringlets. But I found that Jason knew that hair unbound, how it fell in a shining black river over shoulders as smoothly curved as the alabaster of her face, and each separate hair of it burning the flesh like a blue-hot wire when he brushed it with his hand.

JASON'S memories welled up in my brain and Jason's voice filled my throat with Jason's own words in his own Grecian tongue.

"Circe—" I heard myself saying thickly. "Circe, my beloved."

The fire leaped upon the altar, casting green highlights upward on her beautiful, terribly familiar face. And I could have sworn that a fire leaped green in her eyes to match it. The shadows in the temple swayed, and emerald flickerings ran shivering over the walls, like the light reflected from water.

She stepped back away from me, toward the altar, putting out both hands stiffly in a strangely awkward gesture of renunciation.

"No, no," she said in that rich, sweet voice. "Not yet—not yet, Jason. Wait."

She turned away from me and faced the image above the flame. And this time I looke at it fully, and let my memories and Jason's together tell me what goddess it was who stood tri-formed in her temple.

Hecate.

Goddess of the dark of the moon, as Diana was the bright goddess of the light of the moon. Hecate, She-Who-Works-From-Afar, mysterious patroness of sorcery about whom only half-truths have ever been known. Goddess of the crossways and the dark deeds, tri-formed to face the three ways at her sacred crossroads. Hellhounds follow her abroad by night, and when the dogs bay, Hellenes see her passing. Hecate, dark and alien mother of Circe the Enchantress.

Circe's robed arms moved about the flames in a ritual gesture. She said, quite softly, "Now he is come to us, Mother. Jason of Iolcus is here again. Surely my task is done?"

Silence. The green light crawled upon the walls, and the goddess' faces looked impassively into nothingness. On the altar in the stillness that followed, the fire sank very low, sank to a soft greenish ember over which the light moved restlessly—coiling—twining slowly.

Circe turned to face me, her robed shoulders drooping. The greenlit eyes met mine and there was infinite sadness and infinite sweetness in her voice.

"It is not the hour," she murmured. "It is not the place. Farewell for a little time, my beloved. I wish—but the hour will not be mine. Only remember me, Jason, and the hours of our love!"

Before I could speak she lifted both hands to her head and moved long fingers across her face. Her head bent and the lustrous curls swung forward to hide her eyes. There was an inexplicable movement.

For the second time I felt the separate hairs lift on my own head. Because I was watching the impossible. I was watching Circe raise her head from her shoulders in both hands, and watching the head come free—

It was a mask. It must have been a mask.

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Unceasingly the knotted cudgels of the centaurs smashed down, spreading red death, as we moved on through the golden guards (CHAPTER XII)

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She lowered it in her hands and looked at me above the lifeless alabaster features, the clustering dark curls. There was something shocking about the eyes that met mine in her altered face, but for the moment I was staring speechlessly at that impossibly severed head. All of it was there, the elaborate curls whose touch I half remembered, the warm red lips closed on a line of secret, smiling knowledge, the eyes that could burn so green closed, too, behind pale lids and thick shadowy lashes. It had lived and spoken. Now it slept and was only a waxen mask.

Slowly I raised my eyes to the face of the woman who had worn the mask. And I saw gray hair, thin over a gray scalp, weary black eyes netted in wrinkles, a tired and wise and subtly terrified face grooved with the lines of old, old age.

"You are—Jason" she said in a cracked voice, thin and weary. "But Kronos has shaken the cup till the dice reverse themselves. The same dice, yes—but with new numbers upward."

Something seemed to click over in my brain as she stood there speaking, so that I heard her words only dimly in the sudden, appalling realization that this was I—Jay Seward—here on an incredible island facing an incredible altar.

Perhaps it was the very matter-of-factness in that tired old voice that wakened me at last to my own predicament.

KRONOS, she had said. The time-god. Had time swept backward three thousand years? Had the *Argo* really borne me back into the gray mists of the past, to a world that had been legend for all the ages while Hellas rose and crumbled at the feet of Rome? While Rome itself sent out its walking walls across Europe—while Kronos watched the sands trickling through his eternal fingers?

No, it was not the whole answer. Some alien hand had stooped over this world. Strangeness whispered in the earth and waters and wind. Perhaps there is in men's very flesh a certain buried sense that will warn him when he has left the world from which Adam's flesh was shaped. For I knew that much.

This was not—Earth.

I remembered briefly how Euripides had closed his terrible story of Medea and Jason, and the lines seemed to ring with prophetic force in my mind now.

—to man strange dooms are given. . . .
And the end men looked for cometh not,
And a path is there where no man thought. . . .

A path that had led me—where? To the Earth of legend, perhaps! A long-forgotten world where the Isle of the Enchantress lay on some mystic Aegean, worshipping the tri-formed goddess.

Until now I had been caught in the grip of forces almost beyond my control. Quite beyond, if you consider that one such force lay across my mind like a spur and a rein combined—Jason's memories. It was dream-like. And in that dream it had seemed right to me that I bend to the wind's will, the wind that filled *Argo's* sails and carried Circe's voice to me under the dark cypresses. Man bows always to the thralldom of enchantment, in his superstitious soul. Especially the man of long ago—of now—whose daily life was peopled with the gods and demons of his own fear-wrought imaginings.

Fear.

The word roused me.

I knew quite suddenly what it was that brooded like a thunderous shadow above Jason's memories. Fear—of what? Why was I there?

Memories of the ancient wisdom of Euripides stirred in my mind again. What had it been that—

—over sundering seas
Drew me to Hellas, and the breeze
Of midnight shivered, and the door
Closed of the salt unsounded water. . . .

I looked around me with suddenly frightened eyes. The green light that crawled upon the altar showed me every detail of Hecate's temple, and every detail was alien. Panic rose in my throat and the floor sloped beneath my feet downward into a black abyss.

I knew with a sudden unanswerable terror that this was impossible. Either I was sane or I was frantically insane, and in either case it was horrible! Nightmare— The old woman's eyes were upon me, and I thought the closed lids of the living head she held flickered to look, too.

I whirled and ran.

Perhaps I ran because I was sane again. Perhaps because the memories of Jason overwhelmed me. I seemed to feel again the planks of the *Argo* shattering beneath me.

Nothing was solid.

Nothing was real.

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There was a stirring among the robed figures at the door of the temple. I heard a thin, cracked voice crying behind me,

"Panyr—Panyr! After him!"

And I remember hearing a loud staccato of footsteps ringing hollowly in the still temple. Then I was out among the cypresses and running, running—

What I ran from I don't know. From this fantastic world itself, perhaps, or from Jason. Yes, that was it. I ran from Jason, who clung inexorably to the fabric of my mind, pouring the black blind panic of his fear into my soul. Such fear as we have no name for today!

It was terror that only primitive peoples know, assailed by the vastness of the unknown. A fear like an ecstasy that used to fall upon men in the old days when Pan himself peered out at them, horned and grinning, through the trees.

Panic they called it, because they knew that horned head by name.

I ran toward the distant murmur of the sea. Mist drew its soft veils before me, blurring the way. And behind me, muffled by the pounding of my own feet, I heard the clatter of feet that followed. A clatter like hoofbeats thudding upon turf and stone —after me!

I could feel the aching pound of my heart crashing against my ribs. My breath sobbed between dry lips. I ran blindly, wildly, not knowing where I ran or why—until I could run no more.

Utterly spent at last, I dropped by a bubbling green pool in a little glade where all quiet seemed to dwell. Exhausted with flight and terror, I buried my face in the sward and lay breathing in racking gasps.

Someone—something—came quietly up beside me, and paused.

Within me some last extremity of terror —Jason's terror—bade me cower here in the grass forever, if need be, before I lifted my head and looked the terror in the face. But my own mind, swallowed up in Jason's, roused a little at that, and rebelled. Whatever Jason's experiences in life might have been, Jay Seward knew better than that.

There are no fears in any man's life which cowering can solve.

With an infinite effort, that seemed to crack the rebellious muscles of my neck, I lifted my face so that I could see who stood beside me.

CHAPTER IV

Trust Not a Faun

LATER, I came to know Panyr very well. But he never seemed less strange to me than in that first moment when our eyes met by the pool. The barrier of his alienage always had power to make me pause a little in sheer disbelief. Yet most of him was—human. I think if he had been less nearly human he would have been easier to accept.

Goat-horns and goat-legs—that was the measure of his difference from the rest of mankind. Everything else was normal enough on the surface. Perhaps his bearded face, with the slant yellow eyes and the snub nose, held a wisdom and a queer, malicious kindness unknown to ordinary men. He did not look old. His tangled curls were black and glossy, but his eyes were betraying.

"So now the fear has gone?" he asked in his strangely deep voice, looking down on me with a faint grin. His tone was conversational. He was squatting on his hairy haunches very comfortably and his eyes were at once amused and understanding.

"There'll be a song to sing about Panyr," he went on, and suddenly laughed, a flat bray of sound. "Panyr the Mighty. So terrible even the hero Jason flees from him like a frightened boy."

I watched in silence, swallowing the indignation that swelled in my throat, knowing he had the right to laugh. But at Jason, not at me. Did he know that? He rose on his crooked legs and walked, with an odd, rocking gait, toward the pool, stood looking down at his own reflection thoughtfully.

"My beard wants combing," he said, scratching it with strong, hairy fingers. "Should I summon a dryad from that olive tree yonder— I wonder, now, Jason. Would you fly in terror from a young dryad, too? Perhaps I'd better not risk it. The pretty thing would weep, thinking you scorned her, and then I would have to console her—and to tell you the truth, Jason of Iolcus, I'm a little tired after the run you gave me."

I think that from that moment I trusted Panyr—strange product of a strange, lost world. Even when I saw his yellow goat-pupiled eyes glancing toward the wood

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across my shoulder, saw the look of fleeting satisfaction cross his face. I thought then it was a dryad he watched, his talk had been so casually convincing. Yes, I trusted Panyr, with his snub nose and mocking grin, and those curved horns rising from the tangled curls. Even if the fear had not left me already, I believe Panyr's words and his smile would have dispelled it.

"Is the fear gone now?" he asked, suddenly quiet and unsmiling.

I nodded. It was curious how completely that panic had drained out of me, perhaps in the catharsis of the chase itself, perhaps in some snapping of the link that had given Jason's mind ascendency over mine.

And yet the fear was not gone completely. Far back, deep down, the formless shadow still couched. Jason knew things I did not—yet. And perhaps he had reason for terror. Perhaps soon I too might know it.

Panyr nodded at me as if he had been watching the thought-processes move through my mind. He grinned, flirting his short tail, took a couple of prancing steps beside the water. He glanced down at it.

"Drink," he said. "You must be thirsty, after all that running. Bathe if you like. I'll keep guard."

Guard against what? I wondered, but did not ask. I needed time to marshal my bewildered thoughts.

First I drank, and then dropped my clothing from me and lowered myself into the icy waters. Panyr laughed at my involuntary gasp and shudder. The pool was not large enough for swimming, but I scooped up handsful of sand and scrubbed my skin until it burned. I was washing away the sweat of fear—of Jason's fear, not mine.

I was thinking, too. But I found no answer. Not until I had emerged from the pool and was dressed again, and sat down on the moss to look at the satyr searchingly.

"Well," he said prosaically, "Circe had a fine welcome from her lover. You ran like a frightened hare. I never had much love for Jason, but if you are he—"

I said, "I'm not Jason. I remember Jason's life, but three thousand years have passed in my world since he died. New nations have risen, new tongues are spoken." I paused there, startled, realizing for the first time that I was speaking the old Greek with effortless fluency, and with an accent quite different from the one I had learned at the university. Jason's memories, couched in Jason's tongue and flowing from my lips?

"You speak well enough," Panyr said, chewing a grass-blade. He rolled over on his stomach and kicked at the moss with one hoof. "Your world and mine are linked somehow, strangely. I don't know how, nor do I care, really. There's little the goat-men do care for." A gleam showed yellow in his eyes. "Well, a few things. The hunt, and—we're a free people. The hand of man is never raised against us, now. We walk in any city, in any forest, without harm. I might be a useful friend to you, Jason."

"I think I may need friends," I said. "You could begin by telling me what really happened back there in the temple. And why I'm here."

PANYR leaned toward the pool and ruffled the waters with one hand. He stared down. "The naiad is silent," he said with a sideward glance at me. "Well, there are heroes aplenty, and great deeds and mighty gods in the annals of this world. But the heroes are all long dead, and most of the gods with them. We fauns are not gods. Perhaps it's the weakness in you I like, Jason. You're no strutting hero. Perhaps it was the way you ran. *Ohé,* by my Father, how you ran! How your heels spurned the earth!" And the faun lay back and bellowed with rather embarrassing merriment.

I could not repress a grin. I knew what a picture I must have made, fleeing through the forest. "You may have many days of laughter ahead of you, then," I said. "Judging from what I've seen of this world of yours, I expect I may do a good deal of running."

Panyr's shouts redoubled. Finally he sat up, wiping his eyes and still chuckling. "A man who can laugh at himself—" he said. "The heroes never knew how. Perhaps it means you're not a hero, but—"

"Of course," I interrupted him. "When I have a little more knowledge and a weapon of some sort, in that case, others may do the running."

"That too I like," Panyr said.

"What was it that really happened in the temple?" I demanded, tired of circumlocutions. "Was the priestess Circe? Or was it a mask?"

He shrugged. "Who knows? I never wore it! I only know that since the first Circe died, whenever the priestess who prays in her name wears it, that priestess speaks

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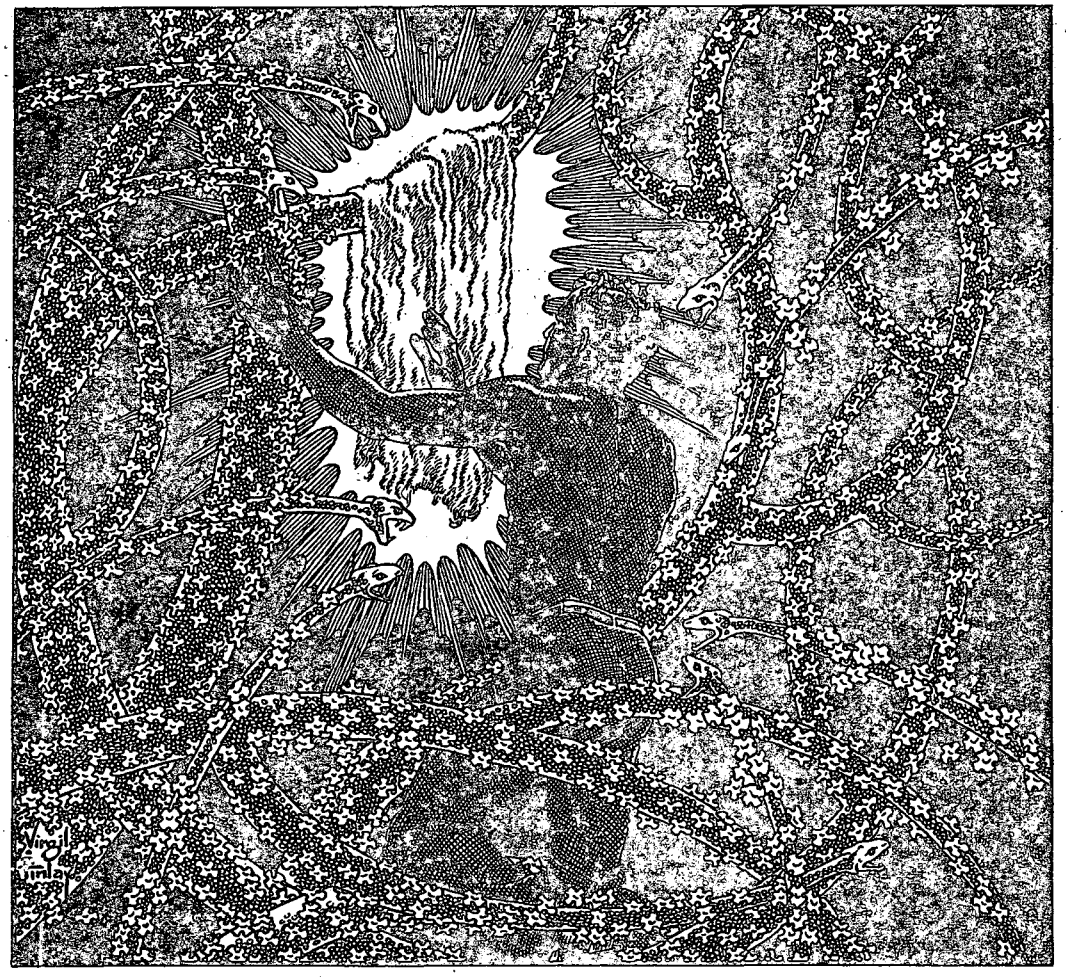
with the same age-old voice and looks out with the same eyes that Odysseus once knew. When she lifts the mask, she is herself—as you saw. But something in the mask remains alive and haunted by an old, old love and an old hate—something that was Circe once and cannot rest. Because of Jason. You tell me what it was—or ask me no more questions."

pretty thing in those days. Oh, not for me. There are dryads enough to keep Panyr busy. But if the Circe had called me as she called you, I'd have come sooner. Or later. If the young Circe were alive, now, it might be worth your while to find her."

"The young Circe?" I echoed.

"You saw how old the Old Circe is. Drawing very near her end, if you ask me.



Hanging among the serpent-branches burned the Fleece (CHAPTER XIII)

"I don't know what it was!" I said despairingly.

"You're here, though." He scratched the curls at the root of his left horn and showed his teeth in a grin. "You're here, and I think for a purpose. A pity you chose the wrong time to answer the Circe's summons. If it had been I, I'd have answered when she was forty years younger. She was a

I was a young buck when Hecate's curse was laid on Jason, and I've seen many Circes come and go since then. I forget how many—one loses count after one's old friends go. As for the newest Circe—well, she was worth the seeing. But the priests of Helios slew her three days ago." He cocked his horned head and grinned at me.

"You don't seem to care very much," I

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said. "Helios—what's that?"

"Apollo's fortress, the golden city, where they worship the Ram with fire and blood. There's an old war between Hecate and Apollo. Legend said it could never have been lost or won until the *Argo* brought Jason back—which is why you're here, I suppose. Wars between gods are not for me, but I hear the rumors."

"You talk as if Circe had remembered Jason for a long while," I said slowly, trying to sort out a modicum of sense from his rambling. "The truth is that she'll never rest until she reaches him again through—through me? Then that summons you speak of must have been unanswered for a long time."

"A very long time. The lives of many priestesses who wore the Mask and called in Circe's name. While the memories of the dead Jason slept, perhaps, deep in the minds of many generations in your own world. Until somehow, something awoke in you."

"But what do they want of me?"

"Hecate had a plan. I think it meant marching on Helios. But the plan hinged on Jason, and she was not sure. She knew the old Jason, and she must have seen him running sometime in the past!"

"You know Hecate's plans so well," I said bluntly. "Are you a priest of hers?"

HE LAUGHED and slapped a furry thigh half in derision. "A priest—Panyr? I lived here before the first Circe came. I remember Circe herself, and Odysseus and all his swine. I've met Hermes walking over this very grass, not touching it, you understand, just skimming over the tips of the blades." His yellow eyes half closed and he sighed. "Well, those were great days. That was before the mists came and the gods went, and all things changed."

"Tell me what they want of me—do you know?" I asked without much hope of information. It was difficult enough getting the basic matters straight, without following up every lead he offered me, grinning in his curly beard. His mind seemed to leap from subject to subject with goatlike agility.

But when he wanted to be clear, he could be. This time he chose to answer.

"Jason swore an oath before Hecate's altar, long ago," he said obliquely. "He broke the oath. Do you remember that? He went to Circe afterward, to ask a favor of her. That was the real Circe, of course, when she still lived. Something strange happened between them. No one understands that, except perhaps yourself. What was it that set Circe on fire for you? What was it made her hate you as hotly as she loved you? Hecate's curse and Circe's love and hate have not died to this day. I think your coming will round the circle out and you may have difficult deeds to do before you're free again. There's one thing to remember—unless you find the young Circe, you'll know no peace."

"The young Circe? But—"

"Oh, yes, the priests of Helios slew her. I told you that." He grinned again and then sprang suddenly to his feet, hoofs clicking briskly together. His eyes glanced across my shoulder toward the trees.

"You have an urgent engagement just now," he told me, looking down into my eyes with an expression I could not read. "If you're Jason and a hero, you have my heartiest blessing. If you're not—well, I'd like you better, but your chances are worse. Let me give you two more words of wisdom before I go."

He bent down, and his yellow gaze caught mine with a compelling stare. "Without the young Circe," he said, "you'll never know peace. Remember that. As for the other thing—" He sprang suddenly away from me with a goatish bound, his tail twitching. Over one bare brown shoulder he gave me a parting grin. "As for the other thing," he called, "—never trust a goat-man!"

It was too late. He meant it to be too late. Even as a shock of tardy alarm shot through me and I tried in vain to turn and rise in one motion on the slippery grass, I caught the flash of golden armor directly at my side, a blade poised overhead between me and the misty sky.

Panyr had done his work well. His laughter, his rambling talk had very efficiently covered any sounds that might have come to me in warning from behind. I had time for one dazzling glimpse of a man above me and of others crowding in at his back.

Then the sword fell. . . .

A long period of darkness followed, and then I became aware of voices speaking nearby.

"—turned the flat of your blade? You should have killed him!"

"Kill Jason? You fool, what would the high priest say?"

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"If he's Jason, all Apollo asks is his quick death."

"Not yet. Not until the young Circe—"

"The young Circe died on Apollo's altar three days ago."

"Did you see it? Do you believe all you hear, young fool?"

"Everyone knows she died—"

"Does Jason know? Phrontis wants him alive, because of her. We're to let him escape, do you understand that? He must be let free and unharmed when we get ashore. I know my orders."

"All the same, if—"

"Hold your tongue and do as you're told. That's all you're fit for."

"What I say is, we shouldn't trust that faun. If he betrayed Jason, won't he betray us too? Everyone knows you can't trust a faun."

"Believe me, my lad, the faun knew what he was doing. In the long run I think he works for Hecate. Perhaps Hecate herself wills us to capture this Jason. That's not our affair. The ways of the gods are outside human understanding. Be silent now. I think this Jason is stirring."

"Shall I give him another thwack to keep him quiet?"

"Put your sword away. Is that the only use of heads? Be silent or I'll crack yours."

I rolled over blindly on a hard surface that rose and fell gently. For one nostalgic moment I had a feeling of terrible longing, a hopeless yearning for the ghostly ship of Thessaly that had sunk beneath me in these strange waters. Jason, mourning for his lost *Argo*.

This was not the *Argo*, but it was a ship. And as my mind came back to me, burdened with the memories of Jason's mind, I heard in the wind the far, faint braying of trumpets, not Triton's conch, but a brazen crying, importunate and menacing.

I opened my eyes. Bright golden decks blazed around me. Two men in dazzling mail, silhouetted against the blue sky, watched me disinterestedly. There must have been a second galley following the *Argo*, I thought in confusion. One we had rammed and sank, but there was this ship still in waiting offshore.

One of the men above me lifted a quizzical eyebrow and met my eyes.

"We'll be in Helios in half an hour," he said. "I wouldn't be in your shoes for a good sum, Jason of Iolcus."

CHAPTER V

Priests of Apollo

VEILING mists parted, and for the second time I looked on Helios—Helios, burning with beauty, bright as the ardor of the sun-god himself. Trumpets called from its walls. I heard the bireme's overseer shout, whips cracked and the ship leaped forward toward the golden quays of Apollo's city.

Roughly my bright-mailed guardians hurried me down the gangplank to the pier. Anger was rising in me, perhaps the beginnings of rebellion, but I was too interested just now to protest. The city was a strange and fascinating place, lifting behind its bright walls in a series of multiformed roofs.

For a moment a familiar shivering and the icy sweat of Jason's memories swept me—the locked door in my mind opened and Jason's thoughts surged in. I thought, there will be darkness upon Helios soon.

The sound of trumpets shattered that foreboding. Shrill and high from the towering walls it rang. And Jason's fear walked with me as I stepped forward toward the gateway to Apollo's citadel.

Greek the city was—but more than Greek, too. Somewhere along the line of its culture it had turned a little away from the classic foundations, and there were hints of strange and fascinating newness blending with the familiar Greek simplicities of design.

Nowhere was this clearer to the eye than in the great golden temple in the heart of Helios. Gold it could not be, I told myself, unless the transmuting of metals was one of these people's secrets, but gold it seemed to the eye, as the galleys had been golden, dazzling, impossible to look at except obliquely. Three hundred feet high those glittering walls loomed, straight and unadorned except by their own brilliance. I did not need to be told that this was a god's house—Apollo the Sun.

Strangely, we did not move directly toward that shining building. The streets were thronged and narrow. Strange faces stared at me. And then, suddenly, I was no longer in the custody of the bireme's mailed men.

Their firm grip had vanished from my elbows. The street lay crowded and imper-

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sonal before me. For this instant I was free to run, if I chose to run. But remembering those voices overheard in the daze of my awakening, I stood still, rapid thoughts moving through my brain.

I was tired of being a pawn in the hands of these unknown forces. They thought I was wholly Jason, with Jason's full memories. They thought I knew where to run. Well, I did not know.

"Hanged if I'll play into their hands," I told myself angrily. "Let them take over, for I don't know the rules of the game! They want me to run. Well, we'll see what they do if I won't run. I want a talk with this high priest of theirs. I'll wait and see."

So I stood motionless while the crowd eddied around me, curiously glancing at my strange clothing as they passed. And in a moment or two I saw a gold-helmed head peering at me from around the corner of a building. Almost laughing—for this game had its ridiculous side—I crossed the street toward him. Another soldier stood behind him.

"Let's go on to the temple," I said calmly. "I want a talk with this—Phrontis, did you call him? Will you lead, or shall I?"

The man scowled at me. Then a reluctant grin creased his face. He shrugged and pointed me on toward the looming walls of Appollo's golden house. In silence we three trudged toward it through the crowds.

We went up a ramp where a great gate creaked solemnly open to admit us. We passed through a doorway like a chasm in the gold. Then we were hurrying along hallways broad as city streets, and as crowded with courtiers and priests and men in armor that was pure gold to look at. No one noticed us. Jason's coming to Helios was apparently secret from these busy throngs.

Many races moved among the tall Greeks here, Nubians, Orientals in jeweled turbans, slave girls in bright tunics, young acolytes to priesthood, every age and condition of humanity seemed to swarm in the golden halls—from slim, pale Scythian courtesan to black-bearded Persian fighting-man.

We turned down what would have been an alleyway had these great streets been open to the sky, moved rapidly among more furtive denizens of the temple, and my guides paused before a grilled door, while the elder drew the hilt of his dagger across the grill, swiftly, twice over, making the iron ring with a sharp, vibrant music.

WITHOUT a sound of hinges the door swung open. A violent shove upon my back thrust me stumbling forward. I got my footing again in a dim place inside, hearing the clang of the door behind me.

Then a girl's voice murmured, "Will my lord please to follow me?"

I looked down. A little Nubian girl with the silver collar of a Helot clasped about her slim, dark neck was smiling up at me, her teeth very bright in her pretty, polished-ebony face. She wore a turban and brief tunic of pale blue, and her feet were bare and ankleted with silver bells. She looked like someone's pampered servant, as she no doubt was. There was faint impudence in her smile, and she had a pretty, delicate face. Behind her another girl, golden-skinned and slant-eyed above her slave collar, watched me in silence.

"This way, my lord," the Nubian murmured, and went tinkling away down the dim hall. The other girl bent her head to me and fell in at my heels as I turned to follow.

There was only darkness at the end of the hall. No door, no hangings, no wall, but darkness like thick mist. My small guide paused before it and looked up at me with a gleam of teeth and eyes in the dimness.

"My lord will await the high priest of Apollo," she told me, "here in the high priest's private chambers. Will my lord please to enter?" And she put out a silver-braceleted arm and—drew back the darkness.

It was mist, but it folded away to her touch like cloth. No, not to her touch. I looked closer to be sure. It seemed to retreat beneath her hand, so that her gesture was like a command that it draw back—and it did. I walked forward under an opening torn in the dark by her gesture. Light poured softly through from beyond. I paused on the threshold.

The room before me was Greek again, but with a difference. White columns ringed the room, with darkness hanging between them like the darkness at the portal through which I had passed. Overhead were clouds, pale, billowing clouds faintly rosy as if touched by the first hint of sunset or dawn. Slowly, drowsily they were moving, and between them now and then I caught glimpses of a blue mosaic ceiling in which points of brilliance glittered like stars.

The floor was mossily green and gave a

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little underfoot. There were divans in the room, low tables, chests carved with scenes from familiar legends, for the most part, though a few were unknown to me in subject and detail. A brazier glowed in the center of the room, sending out a fresh, aromatic fragrance.

I thought, the priest of Apollo does himself very well, and turned to look for the little slave girls who had brought me here. But I was alone. I wasn't even sure which dark-hung interval between the pillars had admitted me.

There was sudden music in the air. I looked around sharply at that thrill of unseen strings, and saw the darkness flow apart across the room, and a familiar horned head grinned at me through the opening.

As I stared I saw one sardonic, goat-yellow eye close in a slow wink. Then the faun laughed, glanced back across his shoulder, and said:

"Well, this is the man. At least, he's the one the Circe named Jason."

"Good," a new, deeper voice said. "The Circe should know, at least. Well—so this is Jason!"

Through the rift in the darkness came Panyr and, behind him, a tall, golden-haired man, one who might have stepped out of some antique myth. He looked like a demigod—tall, strongly-made, with sleek muscles that rippled under his thin golden tunic, and blue eyes that held in them something faintly disturbing. A tinge of lambent radiance seemed to linger on his tanned skin, almost luminous, almost as though the sun-god himself, radiant Apollo, stood before me.

"This is Phrontis," the faun said. "I'll leave you with him. For a while, at least." He moved nimbly toward the pillars and the darkness parted to engulf him.

Phrontis went without haste to a couch, nodded toward another near him, and dropped down casually. He stared at me as I found a seat.

"Jason," he said lingeringly. "I suppose we are enemies, then. At least, our gods are enemies. Whether or not there's sense in it, is not for me to say. However, at the moment, there are no gods in this room—I hope. So drink with me while we talk."

FROM behind his couch he brought a crystal vase, filled with yellow wine, sipped, and passed the goblet to me. I drank long and thirstily. Then I put it aside and took a deep breath.

"I haven't said I'm Jason," I told Phrontis.

He shrugged. "Well," he said disarmingly, "I am a young priest, as priests go. It's an accident that I hold the power that I do. There's much I don't know—and that may be to your advantage. The young are skeptical. Ophion, now—he is the real priest of Apollo, and he's very dangerous to you. Because he believes in the gods."

"You do not?"

"Why, yes," he said, smiling. "But I don't think they are gods, except to men like us. Is there wine left? Good." He drank. "Now, Jason, let us talk for a while like sensible men. Ophion is tortured by superstition, and he is justified enough. I have studied. It's true that there are things I don't understand—the ghostly ship, for example—but nevertheless it is only at the temple festivals that I fall on my face before Apollo. Here, in this private apartment, we can talk and question. For example, why didn't you escape when you were given every chance?"

"The ignorant are blind," I said. "And the blind don't run without making certain there are no gulfs in their path."

He watched me. "The ghostly ship sailed by Helios today, and two of our biremes gave chase. One of them brought you back. There are prophecies and legends and warnings—too many of them! When Jason returns, it is said, a curse will either be lifted or redoubled. It's cryptic. Very much so. But if a man questions the gods, he's apt to be blasted with a thunderbolt. Which is an excellent way to discourage criticism." Phrontis chuckled, and shrugged again. "Well, this is not the sanctum or the altar chambers. You wear strange clothes. Generations have passed since the first Jason. I know you are not that one. Who are you?"

How could I explain? I looked at him dumbly, and he laughed and proffered the wine-vase again.

"I'm a student of science as well as of theology," he said. "Let me hazard a guess. There is another world somewhere in time and space, the world from which you came. You are of Jason's seed. Jason must have been of your world, originally. And you have Jason's memories, as the soul of the first Circe dwells in the Mask, and enters whichever Circe happens to serve the goddess in Aeaea."

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"You know that?" I asked. "Then you're the first one I've met here with any semblance of civilization. You're right, I think. But I'm still a blind man. I don't even know where I am."

"Nature tends toward the norm," he said. "This is my own theory, but I think it's accurate. By its own standards, your world is the normal one. Call it the positive pole in the time-stream. There are variants in your world, but they don't last long. Mutants are born; miracles happen, but not often, and they pass quickly. For they are the norm of *this* world—the negative pole in the time-stream.

"As for how these two worlds meet—to know that, we must be able to comprehend dimensions beyond our scope. Perhaps the course of your world's time is like a winding stream, while ours runs straight as a canal. And sometimes the two streams intersect. One such intersection, I know, came generations on generations ago for us. How long ago for you?"

"Jason lived three thousand years ago," I said.

"As long in our world," he said. "Three thousand years ago the two worlds intersected as the time-streams crossed. We have legends of the *Argo's* voyage but I think that voyage took place on both our worlds, yours and mine. They mingled for a while then. Look, now. I've said your world is the positive norm. Whenever too many negative concepts are built up there, the time-streams intersect, and an exchange takes place. Your —mutants—are drained off into my world, as our positive concepts are drained into yours, to strike the balance. Do you understand?"

I had a glimmering—the principle of the simple electromagnet. Positive force building up at one pole till polarity was reversed. Yes, I thought I could understand the principle. It was not basic logic by any means, but I could visualize a cosmic see-saw, continually rising and falling whenever the twin worlds crossed in that cosmic stream of time.

Phrontis spoke. "The gods are dangerous enough, but—well, they simply have non-positive powers, less limited in this world than in yours from which they may originally have come." He glanced toward the columns. "I hear Ohphion, the high priest. He's still called that, though I perform most of his duties for him, since Apollo accepts only perfection in his priests. Ophion was injured some while ago.

"Listen, Jason who is not Jason. Ophion will speak to you. Remember, he has served the god for a long while and is superstitious. Use your judgment. I wanted to talk with you first, because I shall be high priest soon, and I prefer science to theology. Ophion believes in flaming thunderbolts to solve his problems. I have other ideas. We're both sensible men—so remember what I've told you."

He smiled and stood up as the darkness parted between two pillars, and a man hobbled awkwardly into the room.

Hephaestus—Vulcan! Vulcan, who was flung from Olympus by his father Zeus and lamed by that titanic fall. This man was godlike—and fallen too.

Within him glowed the same golden, luminous quality that seemed to permeate Phrontis, but it was the light of beauty permeating a crumbled Praxilitean marble, hinting at the original perfection despite the ruinous attacks of time.

It was not time alone that had marked Ophion's face, though. I thought that the attack had, somehow, come from within. As for his appearance, he might have been Phrontis' brother, but a brother who was not only older, but sadder, and afraid.

CHAPTER VI

Echoes of the Past

OPHION stood there, stooping a little, his heavy shoulders bent forward. His eyes were blue like Phrontis', but deeper, a winter sky as Phrontis' eyes were the summer sky. Lurking in those depths was a knowledge that Phrontis, for all his skeptical wisdom, did not have.

He said slowly, "You could not wait for me, Phrontis?"

"I've saved you trouble," Phrontis answered. "There'll be no need to waste your time in elementary questioning now. Jason knows all that is necessary for him to know."

"He is Jason?"

Phrontis waved toward the pillars. "The faun Panyr has said so."

Ophion turned to me. His voice was disinterested, as though he recited by rote.

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"Listen, then," he said. "There has always been war between Apollo and the dark goddess Hecate. Long ago Jason stole the Golden Fleece, Apollo's special treasure, and fled to the protection of Hecate, on Aeaea's isle. Because the Circe loved Jason, she aided him. Then Jason died, or passed, or vanished, and the war went on. There was a prophecy that when Jason came again, he would be as a sword against Apollo in Hecate's hand. So—we will break that sword now."

He studied me.

"There is also the matter of the Circe. She is Hecate's arm, as you were to be her sword. Till the Circe dies and the Mask is broken, Hecate has power. And the war between Hecate and Apollo must never be allowed to reach the point where Apollo must fight the dark goddess on her own ground. Never yet—" His voice sank. "At least, only once has Apollo turned his dark face upon this land. He is lord of the eclipse, as he is also lord of the bright sun. But once, it is told, Apollo walked in Helios during the eclipse—the Helios on whose ruins we have built this new city.

"There will be an eclipse of the sun soon. You must die before then. But your death alone will not be enough. For Jason died, and now has come again. Hecate's arm must be destroyed as well.

"The Mask—and the Circe—they must be destroyed forever, so there will be peace under Apollo."

Silence brimmed the room. Phrontis broke it. "Still you have not told Jason what he is to do."

Ophion moved suddenly, shivering where he stood. Those deep, strange eyes moved from Phrontis to me.

I said, "Why was I supposed to make my escape from your soldiers?"

But Ophion did not speak. Phrontis said, "Why not tell him? He's no fool. Perhaps we can bargain."

Ophion remained silent, and the younger priest, after a brief pause, seemed to make up his mind.

"Well, Jason, here's the reason. We wanted you to escape so you could lead us to the young Circe. You can still do that. If you can, you need not die. Is that true, Ophion?"

"It is true," the priest said somberly.

I thought mockery showed briefly on Phrontis' face. "So we can bargain, perhaps, Jason. Life is better than death, after all—no?"

"Perhaps, perhaps not," I said. "I don't know who the devil the young Circe is. Why not look for her on Aeaea? I last saw Circe there."

"That is the old Circe, the one on Aeaea," Phrontis answered. "Not for years has she held the goddess. She isn't strong enough. You see, when the Circe dies, the Mask is handed on to another priestess—the next Circe. With the Mask goes the power of Hecate. So the Circe of Aeaea is very old, and if it should come to a clash between glorious Apollo and the dark goddess, a strong arm will be needed, and a newer, younger priestess—such a one is the new Circe, the next inheritor of the Mask.

"We had her here in Helios."

I said suddenly, "I've heard of that. You killed her."

"We did not kill her," Phrontis said. "She escaped. She could not have left the city; we have excellent guardians at the walls. So, because the web of fate is weaving toward a certain pattern, because Jason has returned, we must find the young Circe and kill her. If she lives to wear the Mask, then

[*Turn page*]

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through her and through you, Hecate can make war on Apollo, and the time of the eclipse is too close for comfort. You had better bargain with us, Jason. Who can fight against the gods?" But his voice was unctuous, and he stole a quick glance at the oblivious Ophion.

I said, "I can't lead you to this Circe of yours. If you don't know where she is, I'm sure I don't."

THE priest stared at me keenly, then smiled.

"There is one who does know," Phrontis said. "In a temple like this rumor runs faster than winged Hermes. Already I know very well that news of Jason's coming is buzzing in certain quarters of the city. You have only to wait. Sooner or later—and sooner, if I know Helios—word will get to you of what to do next. Where to go. Then—" He lifted expressive golden brows.

When I did not speak, he went on smoothly. "Then you come to me. Or send word. We will give you quarters here in the temple, on the outskirts, where messengers can reach you without too much difficulty. Very pleasant quarters, my friend. You need not be lonely while you wait. We have many accomplished slaves who—"

"Whose greatest accomplishment is spying," I suggested. "Well, suppose I agree? Suppose I find this girl for you? What then?"

His blue eyes dwelt speculatively on mine. As clearly as I saw the eyes I saw the thought behind them—a sharp sword or an arrow in the back was what Phrontis was thinking. I could tell that, he was so much closer to my own civilization than anyone else here on this alien world!

All he said was, "A reward worth working for, if you ask it. What is it that you desire most, Jason?"

"The truth!" I said with sudden anger. "The one thing no one here can give me! I'm sick of all these evasions and half-truths and the lies you tell so easily when you promise rewards. I know what reward I'd get!"

Phrontis laughed. "Fair enough. Jason always got his value out of a man. All right, then this much truth—I'll confess it would be easiest to kill you once we have our hands on the young Circe. Naturally I thought first of that. But since you have sharper eyes than most, then I suppose I must swear some oath I dare not break, to give you assurance. What besides truth, then, do you ask of us?"

I closed my eyes for a moment, an intolerable wave of longing for peace from this dilemma rolling over me. To be free, to go back to my own world unburdened by the chaotic memories that too-deep probing had unloosed upon my mind—that was what I wanted above everything else in life. Freedom from the memories of Jason!

I said it in a suddenly choked voice. "And if you could do that," I finished. "I think I'd find that girl for you if I had to tear down the city bare-handed. Can you set my mind free?"

Phrontis pinched his lower lip and looked at me narrow-eyed. Slowly he nodded, and I thought I saw other purposes, devious and subtle, take shape on his face.

"Since you ask it, I can," he said. "I'll swear that on the altar of Apollo himself, and may the Ram trample me under his burning hoofs if I fail you. Once you're free of Jason, we'd have no reason to wish you harm. You'd be no danger to us then. Yes, you shall have freedom if you find us the girl."

Ophion woke from his brooding to stare at us, a question on his lips. I saw a swift, wordless sign pass between Phrontis and the old priest. Ophion did not know that I was not Jason, but would Phrontis tell him so?

I did not care. I sighed, a deep, tired sigh. Perhaps it was wrong of me to promise. The girl had done me no harm. And yet I was not obligated to her or to Hecate or to anyone in this strange half-world of legend. I'd been drawn here against my will, cast headlong into danger not of my making, pulled this way and that as a pawn between warring people and warring gods. But I was no pawn. I was Jay Seward, free born and no tool for another hand to wield.

"Then I'll find her and deliver her to your men," I said. "I don't swear by any gods, because it isn't our custom in my land. But I give you my promise. You can depend on it."

Phrontis nodded briefly and rose.

"I believe you," he said. "I know the truth in a man's voice when I hear it. Remember your promise and I'll keep to mine. I must consult Apollo's oracle on this matter. When I return, we'll make our final plans. Will you wait for me here?"

I nodded. He gave me a half-salute of parting, and turned toward the way by which he had come. Ophion paused, looking at me

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with a long, troubled stare. Once he caught his breath to speak, but he shut his lips on the unuttered words and turned toward Phrontis, who held the curtain of the darkness open for him.

MUSIC faded softly on the air as the dark closed behind them. I dropped back on my couch and stared at the mist resettling in their wake, wondering what I should do next. Not that there was much I could do, here! I looked about the room, finding no answer. Overhead the rosy clouds rolled slowly, formless and chaotic as my thoughts.

Could I trust Phrontis? There had been subtle scheming in his eyes when he swore to help me, and it might be that what I asked for would not be what I got. And the girl, the young Circe. Conscience nagged at me when I thought of her. I was not Jason—I had no duty to Circe, masked or unmasked. But—

"Jason—Jason of Iolcus—beloved, do you hear me?"

The words were so clear they might have rung out through the silent room, but I knew they had not. I knew they echoed only in the haunted chambers of my own skull. The shuddering and the chill sweat came over me again, and I was Jason.

Very clearly I could see the lovely, familiar, green-eyed face of the Enchantress-Mask, bending above Hecate's flame. I knew that face well—I had loved it once and seen hatred and helplessness upon those pale features, exquisitely moulded of living alabaster. Love and hatred mingled—why? Why? Not even I knew, and I was Jason, Aeson's son, lover of many women but never Circe—lord of the lost *Argo*. My heart turned within me when I thought of the ship. (*Argo*, my own, my swift and beautiful!)

"Jason, come back to me," the sweet, faraway voice was calling through my brain. "Jason, beloved, you must not betray me."

Now I could see that wonderful white face very clearly, very close to mine, the dark crimson mouth lifted, the long, inhumanly smooth planes of cheek and brow radiant with impossible beauty. The eyes were green fire, green embers smouldering beneath the shadow of her lashes. I remembered from long ago.

"Jason, breaker of vows, murderer and thief—my mother Hecate commands me and I hate you! But Jason, look at me. *Jason, who are you?* Jason, when these spells of madness are on you and another man looks out of your eyes—Jason, who is that man?"

Who could it be but myself, Jason of Iolcus? I felt the surge of long-remembered anger as I met her searching gaze. Circe, enchantress, lovely and beloved, why do you deny me? Why do you cling to me only to demand an answer I cannot give you? Forget this dream of yours and thrust me back no longer. There is no one here but Jason, who desires you.

"Jason, who is that man I glimpse in the moments of your madness, when you are no longer Jason?"

Rage swept over me again—strangling rage that this woman of all women should resist the irresistible Argonaut, this one woman whom I desired more strongly because she would not embrace me like other women, but held me off and cried out her answerless question over and over again. There is no woman alive or dead whom I would not put aside to follow my lovely ship, my *Argo*, my beautiful galley. But Circe, who will not have me, must learn not to deny Jason of Iolcus!

Madness? What was this madness she spoke of? How did she know about those shadows of dizzy bewilderment that could sweep now and again over the clouded mind of even the hero Jason, moments when the brain thickened in the skull and another man's memories moved like madness through my own?

Crash! My mind split with a thunder of the brain louder than a lightning-stroke. Pain danced in my skull shudderingly for one desperate moment, and I knew.

I was Jason! I was Jay Seward! I was both men together! And I had for one terrible glimpse looked through the mind of Jason three thousand years dead, and through the cloud of his madness, and through a rift in the cloud.

And seen, as in a sudden mirror—my own face!

Then the rift closed. Then the memory faded. Jason was gone, leaving me half-empty and shaking with weakness in the solitude of my brain. But I knew a little more, a little clearer.

So Jason, too, had been troubled as I was troubled, with the mysteries of a double mind. In his skull, as in mine, the double memories moved. How and why I did not know. Perhaps I would never know. But some inexor-

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able bond linked us over the hundreds of generations, we two out of all the countless lives between us shared a single chain of the mind. He had not understood. How could he? To him these thoughts of my distant era must have seemed sheer insanity. To me, at least, the names of Jason and *Argo* and Circe were familiar. But as for him—no wonder rage and fear swept over him when the recollection was forced upon him unbidden.

And Circe had known. Circe with her powers over magic and the mind—she alone, perhaps, had sensed the stirring of mystery in the thoughts of this man who desired her, this man she hated and had reason to hate. But this man who gave her at odd times glimpses of another man she did not hate. A man she did not hate at all!

Panyr's words came back to me. "Something strange happened between you. What was it that set Circe on fire for you? What was it made her hate Jason?"

Could it be possible that the enchantress of three thousand years past had looked through Jason's eyes as through a lens, and met mine and— No! It sounded incredible to say, "She loved me." And yet could it be the only answer? What answer fitted better the puzzles that had confronted me in this world? Why else should she call me back?

Only through Jason could she call. Only through her Mask and the priestesses of the Mask.

CHAPTER VII

Slave-Girl's Plea

MUSIC shrilled softly through the air. I came to myself with a jolt. I had not been here. I had stood with Jason in Circe's palace, clasping her lovely, unresponsive body in my arms and trying in vain to evade her searching eyes. I had stood again in Hecate's temple on Aeaea hearing the sweet voice calling me, "Jason, beloved!" But if my suspicion were right, it was not Jason she meant. She had no name to use except Jason, but the man she spoke to was—

A soft hissing of breath sounded. I turned, to see that between two pillars the shroud of darkness had parted, and a glistening ebon face above a silver collar was watching me. It was the face of the little Nubian slave-girl. I saw her eyes shift as she glanced around the room. Then she slipped between the columns, soft-footed, and came toward me across the mossy carpet.

"I was listening," she said. "I heard your promise." Oddly, she had changed. The servility was no longer in her voice nor the delicate impudence on her face. I looked at her more closely this time, seeing the fine modeling of her features, the tilt of her nose, the soft redness of her small mouth. Arrogance was on that face now, but it was no less a pretty face, and it did not look like the face of one who had for very long been a slave.

I had no time for further thought on the matter, for the girl stepped back one step, braced herself on her bare feet, and swung up her silver-ringed arm. Her hand caught me flatly across the face.

The crack of her blow was loud in the quiet room. Caught off balance, I fell back on the divan and sat there gaping up at her in utter amazement. In that instant a number of half-coherent thoughts raced through my mind.

"She's a messenger from Circe's people," I told myself. "She heard me promise—it was clever of them not to wait. Phrontis won't expect to hear from them until he's settled me in my new quarters. This was the time for them to speak now, fast, before he expects it. But why?"

My cheek stung where that angry blow had caught it. I lowered the hand that had risen automatically to touch the spot. Then my mind stopped working altogether as I stared at my blackened palm.

Moving like an automaton, I touched my cheek again and looked at the fresh smear that came off on my fingers.

I looked at the girl. Her eyes were wide. She was looking in terror at my face. She turned up the palm that had struck me and we both stared at her streaked pink flesh where the moisture of the clenched hand had made that dark pigment run.

Her eyes rose again to mine, stretched wide in fright and dismay. My arm shot out. I seized her wrist below the silver bracelet and rubbed the moist palm with mine. It turned whitely rosy beneath my touch.

Still gripping her wrist, I drew the back of my hand across my own cheek, wiping away the dark paint her blow had left. Her eyes

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did not swerve from mine. She was breathing fast, but she did not speak a word.

"How long were you going to wait before you told me?" I asked.

She caught her breath. "I—I don't know what you mean. I only—"

"You heard my bargain with Phrontis," I said harshly. "You came in to punish me if you could. What was the plan? Lead me out somewhere on a pretext of finding the Circe, and push me off the wall when you saw your chance?" I let her wait a moment, her eyes hoping desperately that I had finished, before I said deliberately, "Maybe you never did mean to tell me who you are."

She wrenched at her wrist futilely. "Let me go," she said in an angry whisper. "I don't know what you mean."

It was a gamble. I had nothing to lose by it, and a great deal to gain, and some instinct deeper than reason told me I was right.

"You're the young Circe," I said.

HER eyes searched mine frantically, hoping to find uncertainty there. The longer she delayed her denial, the surer I grew.

I went on in a confident voice, "You couldn't have escaped the sacrifice without help from inside the temple. That stands to reason. And if they haven't found you in the city, for all their searching, the logical answer is that you weren't there. You've been here under their noses all along—here with whoever it was that helped you from the first. The best hiding-place is the most dangerous, and you've found it. Who helped you?"

She shook her turbaned head violently. "I'm not! It isn't true! Oh, let me go—let me go!" Hysteria sounded in her voice, and I saw the tears beginning to gather along her lower lids.

I said, "Careful! Remember that paint runs when it's wet."

She paused in her struggle, looking at me uncertainly. "Does that matter now?" she asked, still in her desperate whisper. "Aren't you going to give me up?"

I hesitated. I'd promised Phrontis, yet—

"Come over here," I said. "Sit down. No, here!" I laughed and dropped to the sofa, pulling her down ungently so that she fell across my knees. It was a loverlike embrace I held her in, but my hand was firm upon her wrist. I knew if I once let her go I'd never see her again in a guise I could be so sure of recognizing. And I was not yet sure which side I meant to play on.

"Don't fight me—you're all right," I said. "Now we can talk without looking suspicious if Phrontis comes back. And we have a lot of talking to do, my girl. Circe—do I call you that? Or have you a name of your own?"

"I—I'm Cyane," she told me, leaning quite motionless in my arms now and looking up at me with steady, lustrous eyes, hazel like running water in the sun and ringed by lashes that cast a velvety shadow on her cheeks. I was trying to picture her without the dark body-paint and remembering Panyr's words about her.

"Cyane?" I repeated. "All right, tell me your story now, and do it fast before Phrontis comes. How did you escape the sacrifice? Who helped you? Is there someone here you can trust?"

"Not you!" she said, a spark coming into the hazel eyes very near mine. "I—don't know whom I can trust. I heard you promise Phrontis to betray me, and I—I came to you just now to beg your help, in spite of what you told the priest."

"You plead forcefully," I said, rubbing my cheek.

She turned her shoulder to me. "Well, I found I couldn't stoop to that. Instead of going on my knees to you, the thought of it—that knowledge that you had sworn to betray me—very well! I slapped you! It's been three days now in the temple, and I've had nearly—nearly all I can stand. I don't care much what happens!"

A tremor shook the slender, darkly painted body across my knee. She bit her soft underlip and drew a deep breath. "I'll tell you, because I must. Maybe if you hear the story—but I'm not going to ask you to help me! It was one of the priests who set me free."

"Phrontis?" I asked her quickly.

She shook her head. "I don't know. In the temple, at the time of sacrifice, all priests look alike. And I was—frightened."

"Tell me."

"I was lying across the altar, under the gold cloth, waiting," she said almost quietly, her eyes going unfocused as she looked back upon that terrifying memory. "I could hear them coming. There was music and singing. And then someone in a priest's robes came out from behind the altar and unlocked the golden shackles that are chained to the altar. I was too dizzy to speak. He hurried me

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through a little door and into an anteroom, and a woman waited there with slave-trappings and a pot of paint. No one said anything.

"Before the paint was dry on me I could hear through the wall the commotion when they found the altar empty. The priest slipped out. I think—" She hesitated. "No, I know he went to bring another girl for the sacrifice. A slave. They put my insigne on her and the word went out that I had died. But rumors move fast in a place like this.

"Since then I've had a room in the slave quarters. Eight of us tend these apartments, where the highest ranks among the priesthood live. The rumor went out that they were bringing a man from Aeaea and I came. I thought it might be someone smuggled in to help me. But when I listened—" She writhed in my arms so that she faced me fully, and her eyes were grave.

"Tell me the truth," she said. "When you made that promise, you meant to keep it."

I COULD have lied to her. I didn't. "Yes," I said quietly. "I meant to keep it." I shifted her on my knee, taking a firmer grip on her wrist. "Tell me one thing more," I said. "Who am I?"

She shook her head, her gaze unswerving on my face. "I don't know."

"How long did you listen to what Phrontis and I were saying?"

"Only from your bargaining. I—I lost my head then. I'd counted so much on your coming here to help me. Perhaps if I'd pleaded with you instead of striking you—" She waited, but I didn't answer. Sighing, she went on: "Well there are those in the city who would help me if I could reach them, but how much they could do—I don't know. Hecate's domain is smaller than Apollo's. That, perhaps, is what their war is about, though I'm not sure. And I must get free—I must! The mother-goddess needs me, and the Circe who rules now is too old to fight."

"And you? What could you do, if you were there again?"

"On Aeaea, you mean?" she said, with dignity. "Myself, I could do little. But with the Mask of Circe, and the power of Hecate, I think I could face Apollo himself!"

A little breeze of chill seemed to me to move briefly through the room as she spoke. There were powers in leash here at which I could only guess, even through Jason's memories. This girl knew more than I about too many things.

I considered what she had said. An idea was beginning to take vague shape in my mind. "The city's well guarded, is it?" I asked her.

She gave me a grim little smile. "So well guarded that I was surprised when I thought even Hecate herself had managed to smuggle in an envoy to help me. There's war between the gods. You can guess from that how closely Helios' walls are watched."

"If I should decide to help you," I said, "what chance have we of escaping?"

I felt her slender body droop in my arms. "So little chance," she told me, "that I might as well have died on Apollo's altar. I was a fool to strike you. Even if you would, you couldn't help me now. And you won't. You promised Phrontis."

Yes, I had given my word to the priest, which might have been a mistake. I wasn't sure now. It had been easy enough at the time, when I remembered how I was being pushed, pawn-like, about the board of a wargame here. But at this moment, holding the young Circe in my arms, watching her thick lashes shadow the eyes like sunny brookwater, it was a different matter entirely to think of giving her up to Phrontis and the altar.

But I had to do one thing or the other. I had to make up my mind. I thought, is there any hope of helping her? But there was none. I knew too little. Jason, whose memories moved so bewilderingly through my mind when I did not want them, had nothing to offer out of his age-old store of knowledge now in the hour when I needed his help most.

I thought with sudden desperation, Give me the answer, Jason! Help me if you can! And deliberately I made my mind blank.

There was—no Jason. There was, in reality, no subtle, untrustworthy ghost of the old hero hovering in my brain. Only his buried memories lay there, deep under incredibly many layers of superimposed lives. But between that age-old mind and mine so close an affinity existed that I could tap his memories, and he—strangely, magically, out of that past which was his future—had completed the time-cycle by tapping mine. Whether or not that was the true answer I did not know. I could only accept it and search with all my mind's strength for the aid I needed.

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Dimly it began to come. The room faded around me. I locked my grip around Cyane's wrist and waited. . . .

A WORD, a picture, swam uncertainly to light and submerged again. Fiercely I dredged after it. A glow, something brilliantly golden, infinitely precious. Something Jason had fought for and won long ago. Something with a secret in it Jason could tell me, if I searched his memories deeply enough.

Golden—gleaming—hanging on a strange tree in a strange, dangerous place—

"The Fleece!" I heard my own voice saying in surprise. "The Golden Fleece!"

A violent wrench at my hand startled me out of my daze. I heard a gasp and the thud of bare feet on the floor. I blinked in bewilderment at Cyane, my captive a moment before, now standing a dozen feet away and looking at me with wide, angry eyes.

"Jason!" she whispered. Her teeth showed white against the darkness of her painted face in a grimace of amazement and revulsion. "You must be Jason! I might have guessed it! Who but Jason would choose so wrong a time to answer the summons of thousands of years!"

I scrambled to my feet, the sweat of my remembering still cold upon me, my mind not yet steady as Jason's memories ebbed away. Ebbed? Not wholly. There was anger in my brain to answer Cyane's anger, and I think it was Jason who voiced a soundless cry to me.

"Catch her, you fool! Don't let her get away!"

She must have seen something of the thought in my face, for she danced away from me backward as I stumbled toward her, my hands out.

"Wait," I said. "There's something! I think I know a way."

She laughed scornfully. "Trust Jason? Medea trusted him—Creusa trusted him, and Queen Hypsipyle and how many others? But not Cyane!"

I felt smooth words bubbling up in my mind like water in a fountain, soothing arguments, phrases bland as oil. But as I caught my breath to speak, the air shivered around us to the music of an unseen harp, and behind Cyane I saw the darkness between two pillars open like a rift in thunder-clouds.

"Cyane?" Phrontis' voice said. "Who speaks of Cyane?"

Tall and golden, he came through the darkness into the room. There were priests behind him, peering curiously across his shoulder. Cyane spun to look, then wheeled again, her eyes imploring me in the smooth dark face.

It seemed to me that my mind turned over upon itself, spilling every crowding thought into utter confusion. Lightning-flashes of plot and counterplot darted through it. Phrontis' eyes rested inquiringly upon mine.

"This is Cyane," I heard myself saying calmly. "The slave-girl here. Catch her—quick!"

CHAPTER VIII

Hecate Speaks

I FOLLOWED Phrontis down a golden corridor in silence. My mind was still in turmoil, but the foremost among the thoughts that seethed in it now was the prospect of surcease—soon—in another hour at most. Phrontis had promised me. For I followed him to the room where the ceremonies of freeing my mind from Jason's would begin.

I was still Jason in part. I could still feel the bubbling up of smooth, easy phrases that offered solace to the conscience of Jay Seward. I hated that subtle, plausible brain intruding itself upon mine. And yet—were these arguments he offered me wholly wrong? Was it Jay Seward or Jason the Betrayer, who voiced them?

"What else could I do?" I asked myself futilely as I followed Phrontis. "We were in a hopeless spot as we stood. No escape possible, and Hecate's fate depending on our escape. Whether I mean to fight on her side or not doesn't matter now. I'm not sure about that. Hecate was a dark goddess, one of the underworld deities, queen of sorceries and black magic. Apollo, at least, is the sun-god—bright daylight against enchantments and night time. You can't judge them on those merits—it's pure legend and may mean nothing. But what else have I to judge them by?

"Well, it doesn't matter. As things stood,

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there was only one thing I could do and it was a blow struck equally in favor of both sides. I won Phrontis' trust. That's worth a lot, because he seems to be very nearly in full charge here. Now he'll work with me. But I did more than that, because somebody powerful in Helios released Cyane.

"Somebody had a plot in motion when he did it. By this act, I've thrown that plot off balance. And any shift in balance just now is good for it may mean help to us; it can't mean any more danger than we were in already—if I'm working for Hecate. If this unknown priest's plans are disarranged, something will come of it and since I'm in Phrontis' confidence now, maybe I can watch for the moment and turn it to my own ends."

But was it Jason who reasoned thus smoothly? I couldn't forget Cyane's eyes on my face as they dragged her from the room. Many women, I knew, must have looked at Jason of Iolcus in such a way, after he had betrayed them. But for Jay Seward it had not been so easy to stand by. Still, if I'd jumped to her defense all that Jay—or was it Jason—had gambled on this desperate throw would be lost and wasted. No, better to let her go with the priesthood—go as far as the altar if need be, while I let chance mature Jason's plans.

We paused before a sun-blazoned door. Phrontis pushed it open and nodded me in, following silently. The room within was star-shaped. Golden curtains cut off the five corners, and a tall man was just lowering the last curtain as I entered. He turned and I looked into the ravaged face of Ophion, the high priest. He limped forward to confront me.

"Son of Jason," he said in a quiet voice, "you go to stand before Apollo. The room beyond this is a part of his holiest sanctum. You will look into the Eye of Apollo, and the memories you hate will drop from you as you look." He hesitated, his fine brow wrinkling a little. But before he could speak further, Phrontis had moved past him and touched a latch in the far wall.

The peak of the star-shaped room opened outward like a comet's tail and I was looking into an infiinity of interreflecting silver walls. Phrontis' hand on my shoulder urged me forward. Half in a daze, I walked forward.

"Ophion will guide you from outside," Phrontis' voice said from behind me. "He must serve as high priest, since technically I am still an acolyte. But I'll stand with him to learn. Are you ready, Son of Jason?"

I was not ready. Oddly, now that the moment was upon me, I felt strangely reluctant to give up those memories that had been torture whenever they came, yet which had promised me knowledge and power I might badly need before I left Helion—if I ever left it alive.

But Phrontis did not wait for my answer. There was a soft rush of displaced air in the room, and when I turned with belated swiftness I was alone. The shining walls had slipped back into place and I saw no way out. Mistrustfully I looked about the room.

It was small. But I could feel the—the power—that quivered and vibrated here from wall to silvery wall, latent unknown forces that might move into life at any moment. There was more power in focus here, I thought, than in the whole city of Helios outside.

FROM the faceted ceiling dim light shot down in a webwork of interlacing rays, ghostly and radiant. The floor sloped down to a shallow depression at the center where a milky hemisphere, four feet across, lay like a pool of opalescent water. The walls were mirror-silver.

I waited, my heart thumping. There was utter silence here. The shafts of dim radiance streamed down in columnar patterns. And after a moment or two it seemed to me they were growing brighter.

The milky hemisphere in the floor was beginning to shine with a cold, ice-bright radiance, and a hint of gold was creeping into that crepuscular glow. Still the silence held. The Eye of Apollo dimmed. The columns of light dimmed with it.

They waned and waxed again, brighter. This time the golden shining was unmistakable. Like the slow pulse of a heart of cosmic light the Eye faded—brightened—dimmed once more.

Faster and faster the changes came. The walls reflected a throbbing series of golden flashes. I saw my own image leaping into clarity and vanishing again, rhythmically, as the sun-shafts blazed down from above.

They flickered like lightning, and suddenly the whole room was an intolerable glare of gold, so blinding I could not face it.

I flung up an arm to shield my closed eyes. Behind the lids colors swam confusingly, like boiling clouds. And then, incredibly, the

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clouds seemed to part and a face looked through them into the depths of my brain.

It seemed to me that every cell of my body retracted instinctively away from that sight. I was aware of a hideous cold crawling through every nerve and muscle as if my flesh itself recoiled by an instantaneous motion deeper than reflex before the beauty of that Face—

Apollo's face.

I was looking upon a god.

Many legends surviving to my own time and world had hymned Apollo's beauty. But it was not human beauty. The face had all the lineaments of human likeness, but the beauty in it transcended any human beauty as the sun transcends candlelight. There are no words in any language to tell you how he looked—or how that godlike splendor repelled the eye that gazed upon it.

He regarded me with remote interest, aloof as all gods must be from human endeavors. I was no more than a ripple upon the surface of divine thoughts incomprehensible to any mind but his. And behind him I was very dimly aware, in no more than a flash of consciousness, of vast golden things looming impossibly high into a golden sky. A god's world!

A god?

I remembered Phrontis' sceptical cynicism. Ophion believed in the supernal beings, but did Phrontis? Could this terrible beauty be only human, after all? Or more than human, but less than divine?

All that went through my mind in the space of one heartbeat, while the Face gazed with cold indifferent interest into mine, through the barrier of my closed lids.

I opened my eyes again. The room was incandescent with light. It seared the eyes. And it was more than light. The galactic energies of the sun itself seemed to pour through body and brain. The power of—of—

The word eluded me. Veils were slipping one by one from my mind in that burning bath. And behind those veils was something that shone brighter than the Eye of the Sun God.

The last veil burned and was gone. . . .

We three stood on a hilltop—Circe and Jason and a great, strange, shadowy figure at our backs. We faced a distant brightening in the air, and fear brimmed in me like wine in a cup. I knew who it was that stood behind me—and she was no goddess. Men called her Hecate.

But in the weeks he had spent on Aeaea, Jason came to learn what truth lies behind the clouded altars.

Circe—priestess of Hecate.

The dark goddess herself—mightily armed.

And I, Jason, son of Aeson, armored in that unimaginably strange thing named the Golden Fleece.

We three stood waiting for coming battle—waiting for Apollo. . .

IT WAS long ago—three thousand years ago. Part of my mind knew that. But the living part of my mind just now dwelt in that forgotten past which was sweeping back upon me in wave after wave of memory. Jason's memory. Each veil of it, I thought, relived in a flash and torn aside forever.

Argo cleaving the purple Aegean water—the dark groves of Aeaea—the faces of many women.

Argo, my own, my swift and beautiful."

What was any woman to me? What was Circe, or Hecate herself, or this monstrous battle between those people called gods—who

[*Turn page*]

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were not gods? True, I had sworn an oath—

But Jason had broken oaths before.

We came to Aeaea three weeks ago, to the white temple and the lovely Enchantress who dwelt there among her half-human beasts.

Medea and I, traveling overland to be cleansed of blood-guilt and to wait the coming of the *Argo*. But there were storms that year, and *Argo* did not come. And while we waited on that strange isle in the Adriatic where Circe wrought her spells, dim, unreal days and nights went by. There was something strange in the very air of the island, as though Aeaea hovered on the edge of the veil that hides another world.

Slowly, during the long summer evening, Jason's thoughts turned from Medea, who was a well-known story now, and lingered upon Circe, the Enchantress. I knew from the first that she had been watching me, not for my own sake, though I did not guess it then, but for another reason—for the sake of another man.

I have a double mind. Always I have had that. Perhaps I was born to it, perhaps it developed in the days when I was a student under the wisdom of Charon, the Centaur. But sometimes another man, a ghost from some unknown Hades, looks through Jason's eyes and speaks with his tongue. Not often. But on Aeaea it happened more often than I liked, and Circe lingered near me while the madness had reign in my mind, her strange ember-green eyes hot upon mine.

Mine? No, that other man's. He was that nameless ghost who shared Jason's brain.

And—a new look began to come into the green gaze. I had seen that look on a woman's face often enough to know what it implied. Well, it was nothing new to Jason that a woman should love him. But uneasiness nagged at me beneath the complacence. There was something here I did not understand.

The weeks were long before the *Argo* came. And before that happened, Circe spoke to me of Hecate, and Hecate herself stepped down from her altar. . . .

We had been drinking wine together in the cool summer evening, Circe and I. After awhile she said to me,

"I have a message for you, Jason—a message from the goddess."

I considered that. The wine was in my head. I wondered if the goddess herself had looked upon me and found me good. Perhaps that was what lay behind the strangeness I had sensed. And legend told of many times before now when a goddess stooped to bestow her favor on a mortal.

Circe said abruptly, "Come with me," and I rose and followed her with a sense of pleasant anticipation. . . .

The goddess spoke to me with Circe's tongue. I did not like what she said. It had a dreamlike quality and I was not sure I believed all of it. There are things too strange even for a goddess to convey.

"Two souls dwell in your body, Jason. One will not know life for three thousand years. He would know the truth of my words better than you, who are still half-savage. Hellas will be only a memory to him, and new nations will rule his world. That man, Jason—not yourself—is the man Circe has so foolishly allowed herself to love.

"Well, I cannot control love. But I wish she might have been born three thousand years from now."

I was afraid. But there was a dizziness in my brain and I thought that—other—that dweller—listened with passionate intensity. I thought he understood.

"Two worlds intersect in this time, Jason. One you know. The other world is my own. In it are those you know as gods and goddesses, but we are not divine. Natural forces made us as we are—the mutation of natural laws."

SHE was not speaking to me as much as to the other Jason—the man yet unborn—who listened with my mind—the man Circe loved.

Well, perhaps I could use him, I thought, and devious ideas began to shape themselves in my brain.

"Those two worlds intersect at this time and place. It is possible to move from one to the other, where the veil is thinnest. At such places, on Aeaea, temples are raised with gateways, doors that open both ways.

"Apollo's temple on Helios is a gateway too. Apollo and I are sworn enemies. He has powers that to you seem godlike, but he is no god. The powers are normal powers, for Apollo has mastered principles of science you have not yet learned. To you they seem magical, as my powers seem necromantic. Yet I am no goddess either, though my powers transcend, in a way, time and space.

"We were born long ago, Apollo and I and

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the others. You have your legends of our lives. Now the twin worlds touch and we can pass from one to another, until the time-streams swing apart again. Then we will pass on beyond your knowledge, and perhaps other gods, or beings like gods, will take our place among mankind. But we ourselves work out our destinies in this farther world no man can enter—without armor."

The voice hesitated. Then it went on more strongly. "I need a man of your world to aid me, Jason. Armed as I could arm him, such a man could win a rich reward of me. I could change your life from its predestined patterns, which are not happy ones. And I think destiny meant you to come to me at this hour, because you know that armor I have in mind for you.

"The Golden Fleece, Jason. The Fleece is armor against Apollo. It was made by another—called him god—whom Apollo slew. Hephaestus, you name him. A man who wears the Fleece can stand against even great Apollo.

"Because we have transcendent powers, Apollo and I can not meet in battle as ordinary warriors do. Only under the certain rare conditions can we meet. The time is ripe now, and I need you, armed with the Fleece, to act as my sword against my ancient enemy. Will you aid me, Jason?"

I did not answer. I was thinking, double-minded, of all she had said. As for the Fleece—I was no fool. I knew it was more than the skin of an ordinary ram. I had held it in my hands and felt the power that trembled among those shining folds. I had taken it from the temple tree in Colchis where it hung guarded by what legend called never-sleeping Python. I knew how how much of truth there was in that story, and how much of falsehood.

Boldly I said, "And what of Circe, goddess?"

Through Circe's lips the goddess said wearily, "She fanices she loves the man she sees beyond you. I have promised my aid to you both. If you swear to help me in my battle, then Circe and Jason, of the double mind, shall share love together—"

Strangely, eerily, Circe's own voice broke in upon the words of the goddess as she spoke through Circe's lips.

"But I am no immortal, Mother! I shall grow old and die long before the new Jason—the one I love—is born again upon earth!"

The goddess said in her own voice, "Peace, child, peace! There shall be a Mask made for you, a dwelling place for the soul of Circe. Each priestess who serves me through the generations shall wear it at my altar and you will live again in each of them until Jason comes again."

And so, in the end, we swore an unbreakable vow together before Hecate's altar. Jason's mind was troubled, unsure of his own rewards and unsure of their values. But he had no choice. When a goddess commands, mortals dare not refuse if they value their futures. We swore.

And afterward, Hecate trained me in the uses of the armor made by a god, for gods alone to wear. Often enough my spirit quailed within me as I had glimpses of the world beyond Hecate's altar, where the gods are so much mightier than men know.

Harnessed demons from Hades I saw—chained Titans shouting in their iron prisons—flames from Olympus lancing through monstrous forests.

Machines, Jason, only machines! The product of another world, another science, another race—not gods.

I did not enter that world. I looked upon it through strange windows Circe opened for me. My other self saw things there that I did not understand.

I had not forgotten the *Argo*. But she did not come, and I waited and worked, learning the ways of the Fleece, shuddering whenever I thought of the hour when I must use it.

CHAPTER IX

Radiance of Death

CLOTHED in the Fleece, I the first Jason, went to meet Apollo.

High upon Aeaea rises a treeless hill overlooking the blue bay. There, where the veil was thinnest between this world and the world of the gods, Hecate came to us in a web of shadow. I saw her, dimly. She was strange beyond telling, she was far more than human, but she did not rouse in my flesh that instant revulsion which Apollo evoked. They were very different, these two beings.

Circe stood beside me. I wore the Fleece.

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And before us the air brightened in a dazzling ring, and within it I saw the Face begin to form.

Feebly I began the ritual that would activate the Fleece. I knew I must, and yet I was not sure I could. For fear was a blindness and a sickness in me, and that terrible Face swept nearer and all my body seemed to shrivel with the revulsion of its presence.

Automatically I did as I had been trained to do. But a cloud hung before my eyes and my brain was not my own. And then, through a rift in that cloud, I saw below me in the harbor the one thing I had loved with a true, unselfish passion—*Argo,* my lovely ship.

Argo! When I saw her, I knew suddenly that I cared nothing for Hecate or Circe or all the gods in Olympus. What was I doing here, sick with terror, fighting another's battles, while *Argo* lay there in the edge of the water waiting for me?

I ripped off the Fleece. I turned and ran. Flickering lightning and thunders raged behind me on the hill, but I paid no heed to them. Only when a mighty voice rang out behind me from the height did I pause for a moment.

"Run, coward—run for your life!" the goddess cried after me. "There will be no escape for you, however far you run. Living or dying, your oath still binds you. One day you will come back. One day in the far future you will walk the earth again and answer my summons. There is one oath you can never break. Circe will wait until you return, and I will wait.

"Go, Jason—go to the doom I could have saved you from. Go to the one thing you love and wait for its blow to slay you! Go, take your kingdom and die."

I ran on. Hecate may have spoken again, but I did not hear any more, for there was laughter on the hilltop now, ringing golden above the thunder of the battle. And the sound of it made my heart shrink and my body recoil from its beauty and dreadfulness. Apollo was laughing as I ran. . . .

Veil by veil the memories slipped from my mind. The shining light bathed me. But there was a troubling whisper floating through that golden silence. A voice I knew —urgent, summoning.

I dismissed it. I let the veils slip away. Apollo's light was not the burning blaze of the sun; it was clear and cool, pellucid as crystal water and calm as Lethe.

A veil caught, ripping into tatters. Through it I saw the curve of goat-horns and anxious yellow eyes.

"Jason—Jason!"

But the peace of forgetfulness was yawning for me now and I would not answer. I sank into the shining emptiness that was the Eye of Apollo. Infinite peace washed over me. . . .

"Jason—Jason!" It was Panyr calling, but I would not answer. What had I to say to Panyr, who was so nearly on the verge of Lethe myself? Let him keep to his troubled world and leave me to my peace. . . .

"Jason! Waken or die!"

The words meant nothing. Or—no, they had meaning, but not to me. They threatened someone unknown, someone named Jay Seward, who was—

Myself!

Jay Seward—not Jason. Not superstitious Jason who had betrayed vow after vow. Jay Seward, who had betrayed only Cyane.

From far away I heard my own voice calling. "Panyr—Panyr! Help me!"

"I can't!" the flat faun-voice cried from far away. "You must come to me."

I WAS blinded by the golden light. But I could move—I had to move. Stiffly, out of a nightmare, I forced my muscles to life. I felt myself stir—I was walking!

My hands touched a surface so smooth I could not be sure it was really there. They slipped, touched again—

"Push the door," Panyr's voice called out of the blinded dream. "Push hard! Jason, you're at the door! Open it! Quick!"

The surface sank away beneath my thrust. And then hairy hands seized mine and dragged me forward. Sight returned to me. We stood in the star-shaped antechamber where I had left Ophion and Phrontis. There was a strange odor in the air—acrid, choking. The smell of blood.

I had no time for that now. I was looking into Panyr's eyes, and seeing relief and anxiety there. The sweat of effort was still on his half-human face and he was grinning wryly. I wanted to ask him questions, but my breath still came too unevenly for that. So I stood there motionless, facing the closed wall through which I had just come, waiting for speech to return to me.

By that time my thoughts had coalesced into something like a definite pattern.

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"Well," I said at last, "let's have it. What happened?"

"Simple enough," he told me with a great sigh, lifting one hand to push the sweat-soaked black curls from his forehead. "I knew the danger of Apollo's Eye. I couldn't get in while the two priests were watching, but a few minutes ago, as soon as they left, I was able to come in."

"But why?"

Instead of answering, he bent forward to peer deeply into my eyes. "You've changed," he said slowly. "Something happened—what? Are you—Jason?"

"I've seen Jason clearly," I said. "Clear enough to know I'm not he. I am someone else. Just as three thousand years ago the Jason you knew had a double mind."

He nodded soberly. "I remember that. Well, are you Jason enough to break your pledges still? Do you know now which side you fight on?"

Apollo's beautiful, hideous face swam before my eyes. I controlled a violent shudder of sheer revulsion.

I heard myself saying:

"On Hecate's—if I can rid the world of Apollo!"

Panyr nodded again. "This time you'll mend the broken oath, then? Well, you returned to us none too soon! I wasn't sure I was doing the right thing when I saved you just now, but perhaps it was fortunate." He shrugged. "When we first met on Aeaea, the Circe knew you must come to Helios, so I kept you waiting until the men from Helios could capture you. That was strategy. And the Circe knew you had to meet Cyane here in the temple.

"But after that, I acted on my own initiative. Being half a god is sometimes an advantage. Humans laugh at me, but not even the priests of Apollo dare harm a faun. So I can walk freely where I will. Does that suggest anything helpful to you? Call on me if you will, Son of Jason, and this time you can trust a faun!"

"You're up to your old tricks again, evading the question," I said. "As for your offer—thanks. I'll remember it. But first, tell me what's happened!"

"Phrontis tricked you, of course. You must have expected that. The Eye of Apollo is not a thing to tamper with lightly. Your memories were being stripped from you, layer by layer. In the end—nothing! You would have lost your very soul. When a man looks into Apollo's Eye, his own eyes are darkened forever."

"So Phrontis still feared and distrusted me that much!" I said grimly. "Well, now he has reason to fear me! Thanks to you, Panyr. I thought, though—" I glanced around uncertainly, "I thought Phrontis and Ophion were to be here for a ceremony of some sort while I—"

Panyr's short laugh interrupted me. "You heard me say I waited until it was safe to enter. Safe! I'm still sweating! By Bacchus, I—"

"The priests!" I reminded him impatiently. "Where are they?"

"One of them's right behind you," he said strangely.

Startled, I whirled. It speaks eloquently for the physical and mental state I was still in that I had not until that moment looked farther around the room, or wondered about the all-pervading smell of blood.

A MAN in golden robes lay sprawled upon the floor by the entrance, face down upon a lake of bright crimson that was still wet and looked to be spreading a little as I watched.

"Ophion," Panyr murmured. "No, it's no good now. You can't help."

"Phrontis?" I asked. The faun nodded.

"Or, in a way, yourself," he added. "You killed him as surely as Phrontis drove the blade, when you betrayed Cyane back into their hands."

"Ophion was the priest who saved her from sacrifice!" I said.

"Surely you might have guessed. Phrontis guessed. But Ophion was still master and he had to act deviously. He used you for that. Perhaps you knew, or sensed it, and in your own turn used him. I'm not sure yet about you. But once Cyane was betrayed, Ophion had to act again."

The faun looked down at the motionless body, his face expressionless. "I thank the gods we fauns are proof against weaknesses like love," he said. "It can lead to dreadful things. It can lead a man like Ophion to—this, for instance."

"He loved her?"

Panyr shrugged. "He did—or thought he did. Ophion was a doomed man from the moment of his crippling. Apollo accepts no imperfect priests. He couldn't hope to live beyond the Hour of the Eclipse, which comes very soon now. Then Apollo

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would—reject—him and Phrontis would be master in Helios. So it didn't much matter what he did—a week early, a week late. You see? I think, at such a time, a man reaches out blindly for human love. Perhaps it was his instinct to save Cyane in propitiation to the Fates, that he himself might in turn be saved. Who knows? Death and love play odd games with mankind. I'm glad we fauns never know either."

"Why did Phrontis kill him just here and now?" I asked, breaking in upon his rambling.

"To stop him from saving you," was Panyr's surprising answer. "I think Ophion reasoned that if anyone alive could help Cyane now, it must be the Son of Jason. It's true you had betrayed her, but he must have hoped you did it only to save her in the end. You came from Hecate. He counted on that. And without you there was no hope at all. So he tried to halt the progress of your madness before it was too late."

"And failed?"

"And died," Panyr corrected me. "Phrontis laughed and came away then, to leave you to your madness. And I got in at last, barely in time. So now you know."

"Where's Cyane now?"

"Imprisoned. Safe for the moment. Phrontis will use her for the sacrifice when the Hour of the Eclipse strikes. Very soon now."

"How soon?"

"To know that you'll have to ask Phrontis. He keeps the sacred hours and minutes."

"I'll ask him," I said. "Can you lead me to him now?"

Panyr's bearded jaw dropped. "What!" he demanded. "You must be mad! Phrontis will—"

"He'll tell me what I want to know, I think. You asked me if I had changed, Panyr. The answer is—yes." I grinned at him, conscious of a surge of assurance such as I had never known before. That strange, alien light which had bathed my brain had left an aftermath of clarity, as though I had just now awakened from a long, dim dream. I knew now many of the answers that were veiled before. I no longer walked blind in shadows.

"You lived on Aeaea in the time of the first Jason," I said, "but I wonder if you know the reason the Golden Fleece is so powerful."

I saw his momentary hesitation. "The Fleece? It's powerful, yes. No doubt there are many reasons why."

"I know them," I said. "The Fleece is something like a machine. The first Jason thought it sheer magic, but in my world, in my time, I've studied the sciences you call enchantments. I'll tell you this, Panyr—the Mask must be brought to Helios,"

"It's never left Aeaea."

"But the soul of the first Circe lives in it. Circe, like Jason, must come again before the cycle is completed, if this deadlock between your gods is ever to be broken."

Panyr looked at me with a dubiety that gradually faded. Suddenly he grinned.

"You speak like a hero," he said ironically. "In the Hour of the Eclipse your remarkable courage may go out with the sun, but I promised my aid and you shall have it. Come, I'll take you to Phrontis. And may Hecate help you!"

CHAPTER X

High Priest's Bargain

JUST an hour later Phrontis was pouring me out another cup of wine. He pushed it across the table, watching me. He thought I was a good deal more intoxicated than I was. This wine was weak stuff compared with the fiery baptisms I remembered from my own world.

"I know. You needn't repeat it," I said. "No one ever looked into the Eye of Apollo before and came out sane. Well, I'm from another world. I don't bear you any grudge for the attempt. You'd have killed me if you could, because you were safer with me dead. But I'm not dead. And the balance has shifted now."

He nodded. "Perhaps."

"You don't want this war between Apollo and Hecate to come to a climax, do you?"

"No. It might be disastrous. If things remain as they are, I look forward to a long and pleasant life." He was quite frank about it.

"And you don't believe in the gods. Well, I don't either. And I'm in a position to know. Still, your long, pleasant life may be very short and disagreeable if Apollo and Hecate meet."

He poured himself more wine. "Well?"

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"They can't meet as we do. Only under certain conditions can they fight at all, and with certain weapons." I paused, sipping. Phrontis leaned forward, his face eager. I had hooked him but he wasn't landed yet! I reminded myself— Careful, careful! He's no fool, this logical priest of Apollo!

"If those tools could be smashed," I said, and sipped again.

"That was my plan," he told me flatly. "To smash you and Cyane, make you useless to Hecate."

I laughed and turned my cup so the golden wine cascaded to the flooor.

"The lives of men! Do you think Hecate can't find other tools? Lives are easily replaced, but there are weapons that can't be. The gods are somewhat more than human—they do have great powers. But not without their tools.

"They could fashion new tools."

"No. The Mask was made by Hephaestus, whom Apollo killed. This world would be safer for us both without it."

"Yes," he said, studying the spilled wine. "Yes, perhaps."

"Not for me, you're thinking. Oh yes, my life can be destroyed too. That thought's in your mind. But what would you have to gain? Look now, Phrontis." I leaned forward, laying my hand on his shoulder. "We're men, not half-gods or gods. But we're clever men. Let these so-called gods fight their battles in their own way, so long as they refrain from dragging us into their squabbles. In my world there is a vast store of knowledge that I could make very useful to you."

He nodded thoughtfully. He was not yet convinced.

"You won't kill me," I said with a confidence I was far from feeling. "And later— I'll be too useful for you to think of it." I must make him think me pliable, as pliable as the old Jason. Already he believed me a little drunk. I waited patiently.

After a time he said, "What is the Mask?"

"I believe it's an artificial brain, in effect. I have no language to describe it to you in your tongue. In mine, we'd call it something like a radioatomic colloid, perhaps, that once was imprinted with the thought-patterns and the character-matrixes of the original Circe." I picked up an image from a nearby table, a figure of a centaur, moulded from clay that had been glazed and fire-kilned. I showed Phrontis a fingerprint on it.

"The mark of the artisan's finger. Perhaps the sculptor died long ago, but this part of him lives on. Do you understand?"

"Fingerprints, yes," he said. "But thoughts! Are thoughts real things?"

"They are real," I told him. "They are patterns of energy that can be recorded, as we've done in my world. The mind of the first Circe lives in the Mask, which is as I say, a machine. The Circes who worship Hecate are ordinary women. The goddess comes to them only when they wear the Mask."

I paused, watching him. Then, "The Fleece," I said slowly, "is a machine too— no more. If that could be destroyed as well—"

Phrontis looked up sharply. His eyes were piercing on mine.

"What do you know about the Fleece?"

I shrugged. "A little. Enough."

His laugh was faintly ironic. "Much or little, it doesn't matter now. Do you think we haven't tried to destroy the Fleece?"

I WATCHED and waited. After a moment he went on. "We know the Fleece is a danger to Apollo. How? Well, only the gods know how. But many high priests for many generations have sought the secret of destroying it. All of them failed. Which is why it hangs in an inaccessible place, guarded to keep meddlers away! What we can't destroy, we can at least keep safe."

"Perhaps I know how to get rid of it," I said carelessly. "We'll discuss that another time. As for the Mask, now—"

"Oh, the Mask. I read your mind, my friend. You want to be sent to Aeaea to fetch it."

I looked as confused as I could. It wasn't difficult. "No one else could be sure of bringing it back," I said. He laughed, and I stood up suddenly. "Get it yourself, then! Go to Aeaea, if you dare, and ask Hecate to surrender the Mask to you! Remember this, Phrontis—I'll work with you, but I'm no tool. I've told you one way to get the Mask. Now think of a way yourself, or admit you can't. And don't keep me waiting too long!"

I stared at him long enough to make my point, then sat down and drank more wine.

Presently he nodded. "Very well, go to Aeaea," he said. "I'll put a ship at your disposal. Meanwhile, you are my friend and guest. I'd rather be friend than enemy to you, Son of Jason."

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"You'll find it more profitable," I warned him.

He smiled. "I'd thought of that, of course. Yes, we shall be good friends."

He lied very gracefully.

Panyr was right. I had changed in Apollo's sanctum. The memories of Jason no longer troubled me. But I had not lost the memories—no, I had found them now. I could draw on them at will. And no longer was I shaken by Jason's unstable emotions.

As for the Eye of Apollo—it was indeed a clever gadget!

Mnemonic probing is nothing new. The being called Apollo, or his priest-scientists, had developed a device highly specialized for psychic probing. Carried too far, it could strip away a man's memories, leaving him helpless as a child. But I had been stopped in time.

I had gained from the experience all the value of a complete mental catharsis, the basic principle of psychiatric treatment. It was the narcosynthetic treatment that had started this trouble for me, and it was the equivalent of narcosynthesis, in a totally alien world, that had cured me, but leaving me definitely on the spot in that alien world.

Many points were not yet clear. By no stretch of the imagination could I logically explain the method by which I had come here. The *Argo* was dust long ago—or was it, after all? The people of Helios knew it, but as a ghost-ship with a ghostly crew.

I could not answer that question, so I put it aside for awhile. There were other questions more immediately urgent, and those I could answer. My double mind, the fact that Jason had sometimes held away in the mind of Jay Seward was not inexplicable now, though it involved space-time concepts that were revolutionary enough.

In effect, I think, it was schizophrenia, though by no means as simple at that. Perhaps the real answer lay in the first Jason's split personality, whose secondary quality had been—myself, or my counterpart, three thousand years ago. One half of Jason was shifty and facile—the half history remembers. The other was troubled with conscience and the dominant Jason thrust it down out of sight. But there was a clear and definite pattern to that hidden half of his mind, a pattern that recurred three thousand years later in myself.

For undoubtedly, I thought, I was a lineal descendant of Jason, of Iolcus. It had been almost infinitely diluted by the intervening blood-lines, but the matrix was there and the matrix did recur. Stranger things have happened in the mysterious ways of inheritance. The same face, the same traits, the same mental make-up can duplicate themselves identically in a man's great-great-great descendants. As mine had duplicated Jason's submerged half.

THE genes and chromosomes, after the thousands of years, recreated the other half of Jason's double mind; a mental matrix through which I slipped back to the unforgotten, the unforgettable memories that science hints lie buried in us all.

I think Phrontis' analysis of these two worlds was accurate enough. This one was negative as our familiar one was positive. Our world trends toward a norm; this one trended away from it. Perhaps the old Greek maps of their known world were more accurate than we think today, though they showed it flat and malformed, surrounded by an Ocean-Stream that poured constantly over the brink into infinity. Perhaps *Argo* sails an Ocean-Stream like that, inexplicable to human minds. *Argo, Argo!*

I put that thought out of my brain firmly. Jason's emotions no longer swayed me. I had Apollo to deal with. He and Hecate and the fauns and their kind were normal enough on this world, though their counterparts had not survived on ours when the time-stream parted.

I did not know why Apollo and Hecate warred or why no other gods seemed to matter any longer. Where had they gone, and why? And why did only these two remain behind? Whatever the answers, I felt quite sure this was no idle Olympian squabble such as legends record. They would have perfectly understandable, logical motives, once I discovered what they were.

Super-powerful, yes—by our standards, but vulnerable to the right weapons. Still, I thought with grim amusement, not even gods like these could survive an atomic bomb!

I didn't even have a revolver. I didn't need one. With the Mask and the Fleece, I'd be ready. . . .

Panyr's hoofs clicked softly behind me in the corridor as I stood thinking outside Phrontis' door. I smelled the musky fragrance of him and heard his breathing at my ear. I looked up. He was grinning.

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"Now what?" he asked.

I squared my shoulders instinctively. The wine was buzzing faintly in my head, but I knew what I had to do. "The Fleece," I said.

Panyr's gaze was dubious. "Do you know what a dangerous thing that is? Have you seen the Fleece?"

"I want to. Now."

The old faun shrugged. "All right. Come along."

Busy priests looked at us curiously as I followed Panyr's twitching goat-tail and clicking hoofs through the temple. But word must have gone out from Phrontis that I was to be indulged—within limits at least—for no one tried to stop us.

A great many preparations seemed to be in progress. We left the private quarters and entered again the thronging public rooms, wide and busy as city streets, and I saw worry and strain on every face, dread, perhaps, as the Hour of the Eclipse drew nearer. I had almost forgotten that. Certainly it would have to enter into my plans.

Twice we saw herds of noisy sheep and cattle being driven into enclosures where attendants with paint-pots gilded their hoofs and horns and hung their necks with wreaths for the sacrifices. The temple was full of the smell of incense being hurried in burning pots through the halls, slaves with armloads of spotless robes, with baskets spilling fresh flowers, with great pots of fragrant oil, all of them jostling one another on their errands and all a little pale and tending to start at sudden noises. Anxious eyes watched the sky from every window as they passed.

The Hour of the Eclipse was approaching, and no one in Helios seemed very happy about it.

AFTER a devious journey Panyr led me up a winding stair and paused at last before a shutter in the high blank wall of a corridor far away from the noises of the more frequented chambers. He laid a hand on the shutter and looked at me doubtfully, hesitating.

"You still don't trust me," I said. "Is that it?"

He met my eyes steadily, and his voice was very serious when he said, "Trust and faith aren't words to be bandied lightly. I'm old, Jason—very old. I know a trust that fails in one lifetime may, in the end, be well kept. When the acorn falls, it thinks the oak has broken faith. But when an oak forest covers the land—"

His voice deepened, and I thought I heard in its timbre a primal strength, a vast vitality drawn from the earth itself.

"Also, I who am half a god, can wait to watch the acorn grow into the forest. I see more than you think. It may be that my plans have nothing to do with yours or it may be otherwise. You die in a few dozen years, but what you do now may change a world five thousand years from now. And I shall see that world, Jason—twin-souled Jason! It may be that I am using you and others as well, to shape a world you will never know."

"That may be," I said. "Until I look on the Fleece—how can I help anyone?"

He grinned. "All right, you think me garrulous. Perhaps I am. I have all the time in the loom of Clotho so I can afford to spin out my thoughts. But look on the Fleece if you must. And be careful how you stare!" He shrugged and pulled the shutter back.

Daggers of golden light gushed through the opening, splashed upon the farther wall, filled the hallway with blinding brilliance. Panyr stepped back, shielding his eyes.

"You look if you like," he said. "It's not for me."

I couldn't, at first. My eyes had to adapt to that dazzling light and even then it was only by squinting and shading my face with both hands that I got a painful glimpse of what lay beyond the shutter.

There is a garden in the Temple of Helios where the flowers of Apollo burn the eyes that behold them. There is a garden where roses of white fire blaze among leaves of flame, dripping droplets of molten sunlight upon a floor of fire. In the center of that garden stands a tree.

Legend records that the Golden Fleece hangs on a tree guarded by an unsleeping dragon. How much less than truth was in the legend I could see as my eyes adjusted to that aching glare. It was an allegory, indeed, but the truth was far stranger than the legend.

I saw the Fleece. It was hard to focus on in all that blaze of shimmering fire, but I could make out the shape of it vaguely, pure gold, burning like the flowers with an unconsuming flame. I could see the ringlets of its pelt, white-hot, delicately curling wires that stirred slightly when the tree stirred.

There was no python in the garden, no

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scaled guardian. The tree itself was the dragon.

I saw the sluggish writhing of its boughs, gold-scaled, flexible, sliding over one another in an endless, sleepless stirring, There were no leaves, but every limb was tipped with a flat triangular head that watched unwinkingly in the glare of the burning garden.

I fell back into the comparative dimness of the passage, hands to my eyes. Panyr laughed. "Go in and take it if you like," he said ironically. "But don't ask me to gather up your ashes for Circe. Not even a half-god could walk in that garden now. Do you still want the Fleece?"

"Later," I said, wiping the moisture that welled to my smarting eyes. "Later, not yet." Panyr laughed, and to stop the derision I said, "I mean it. I know how to get the Fleece when I need it, and when the right time comes I'll take it. Meanwhile the Mask of Circe will have to come to Helios. Phrontis is sending a ship for me to get it. Will you go, or shall I?"

Panyr reached out and slid the shutter closed. In the dimness it seemed to me his yellow eyes were faintly luminous as they searched mine. A vague uncertainty sounded in his voice when he answered me.

"Perhaps you know your own plans. Perhaps you don't. Only a fool would go to Aeaea to rob Hecate of Circe's mask. Do you think you won't be torn apart by Circe's beasts and half-beasts before you've passed the beach?"

"I wasn't last time."

"True," he said, studying me. "Well, no weapons must be carried onto the sacred soil of Aeaea. If you go armed, you won't have a chance. And a sword wouldn't help you against the beasts anyway. It's not my game. Play it yourself and pray for success."

I nodded. "Before the eclipse," I told him, "you'll see the Mask in Helios." Privately I could only hope that was the truth.

CHAPTER XI

Aid From Hecate

GENTLY the golden boat grated its keel on Aeaea's sand. Oarsmen in golden garments leaped out to drag it up the beach and I stepped for the second time down upon the pale, cool strand of Circe's isle.

Fog hung here, as always, veiling the cypresses. I could hear the dripping of moisture among the trees. I thought eyes were watching me there, but I saw no sign of motion. My heart beat a little unevenly as I plowed my way up through the loose sand. Behind me the men from Helios watched in silence. I could expect no help from them. Aeaea was forbidden territory to Apollo's devotees, and they had a healthy respect for the arts of the Enchantress.

I entered the cypress woods alone.

A voice shouted from far away as my foot touched the edge of the mossy grass where the beach ended. It was a hollow, echoing voice, as if the trees themselves were speaking.

"He comes—he co-o-o-mes," the voice cried distantly. And a shivering stirred the trees around me and ran outward until the cypresses moved as if in a strong wind. But there was no wind, and the mist still hung heavy around me, hiding whatever lay beyond.

The crying of the hollow voice went on, but there were other voices in answer before I had gone a dozen steps. Wordless shouts, in voices that sounded half bestial and half human. And I was aware of the deep drumming, more felt than heard, that means hoofs approaching at a gallop. I went grimly on toward the center of the island where I knew the temple stood.

The hoofbeats thundered nearer and nearer. In the fog the sound was confusing, disoriented. I could not tell if it came from one side, or from all sides. There were rustlings in the underbrush beneath the higher soughing of the trees in that wind I could not feel. Then I stopped short and my flesh crawled with sudden horror at the sound of a high, flat, laughing scream almost at my side. It might have been cat or human, or both. It might have been sobbing or laughter, or both. It set my teeth on edge as I stared around in the dimness.

And then thundering hoofbeats were upon me and the world turned upside down. I gasped and floundered suddenly in midair, catching my breath against the rush of air as I was swept sidewise through space, strong arms spinning me effortlessly aloft, strong hoofbeats pounding rhythmically beneath me as the forest rushed past.

Laughter, cold and inhuman, sounded in

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my ear. With a violent wrench I got my head around to see what it was that held me. I was looking into a man's face, into flat-pupiled yellow-brown eyes with that same indefinable touch of the beast in them that dwelt in Panyr's. The man spun me away from him again, laughing his cold, whinnying laughter, and I knew incredulously that this was no human. From the waist up he was man; from the waist down he was horse. With a shudder I remembered the wild savagery of the centaur tribes.

The shrieking, catlike cry came again, and the centaur's laughter rose in crescendo to meet it. I was whirled higher in the air and pitched suddenly free. The hoofbeats swept away into the fog as I hurtled head over heels toward the screaming that was cat and human at once.

Mossy ground received me. Bruised and breathless, I rolled over twice and was somehow on my feet again, panting, wishing ardently for weapons. A lithe shape, darkly mottled, rose up in my very face, great arms outstretched and gleaming with claws like sabers.

I looked into a wild, demented face that was neither human nor feline, but much of both. Then the figure lurched upon me in an embrace like a bear or a man; I felt the cold brush of the claws past my cheek and the velvety power that poured along that slick, hard body as we grappled.

Hoofs clicked on rock and beyond the mottled shoulder I saw horned faun-heads flash jeering past, saw a flung rock hurtling by my head. The wind in the cypresses had risen to a roar—except that there was no wind. I knew it was the dryads of the trees, ready to defend their isle with falling boughs if need be. There was a hiss of seething water from somewhere nearby, where the oreads of the fountains lashed themselves into a mounting frenzy as the whole sacred isle of the goddess rose in its anger to repel me.

LOCKED in each other's arms, the tiger-thing and I crashed struggling to the moss. I knew I must not let go of it long enough for those terrible claws to double beneath me for the disemboweling stroke, and I strained the writhing, velvety thing to me in a desperate embrace. It screamed in my very ear, a deafening, terrifying sound that ripped my nerves as the claws were striving to rip my flesh. I shivered with an involuntary spasm, felt my hold slip upon that muscular, snakelike body, felt it writhe away from me—heard the gasp of snarling, triumphant laughter in my ear.

"Jason—Jason beloved—do you hear me? Jason—come!"

The sweet, distant crying was as clear as if there were no roar of trees or shrieking of wild voices here in the forest. Effortlessly it rose above them. "Jason—Jason, come to me!"

With a sobbing breath the tiger body relinquished mine, rolled away. I got to my feet unsteadily, stared gasping around the clearing. There was a soundless flash of motion, and the mottled body of that which had been both beast and human vanished into the fog and the trees. The fauns' brown shaggy limbs pranced and were gone with a click of hoofs and a chatter of angry voices. The trees soughed and were silent.

"Jason—beloved—come!"

Through a silence that echoed and rang in my dazed ears I stumbled inland toward that sweet, calling voice.

There was no one in the clearing where the temple stood. No robed figures moved among the pale pillars in the fog as I went

[Turn page]

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slowly up the marble steps and into the dimness within.

No priestess stood before the altar. Hecate's tri-formed image rose shadowy in its alcove above the unlighted altar. But light there was. No fire burned where the green flames had crawled before, but a green glow still hovered at Hecate's feet—for the Mask of Circe stood empty on the altar.

I paused involuntarily. And the Mask spoke again.

"Jason, beloved—come forward."

The eyes were closed. The hair lay in coils and serpentine tendrils spread out upon the altar, hiding the white neck. The face was as lovely and inhuman as before, its smooth planes pale as alabaster, and glowing faintly with a greenish inward flame. Beneath the closed lids a thin line of fire glinted, as of banked embers within the Mask.

"Jason," the red lips murmured, and when they parted, green light glowed from within where that which had been Circe still dwelt waiting for Hecate's promise to be kept over three thousand years.

The eyes were closed, and yet in some indefinable way I knew she could see me, and perhaps see my mind and thoughts as well. I drew a long breath and said in a voice that sounded startlingly loud in this eerie silence:

"Jason's memories no longer rule me. I'm here again because I rule them now. I'm here to offer my help to Hecate if she hopes to conquer Apollo in the hour of the eclipse."

Stillness, ringing in my ears for a long moment. The Mask's lips parted at last on a line of green fire, and the sweet, distant voice said, "What do you ask of me, Jason?"

"The Mask," I said.

The green glow mounted and veiled the tri-formed goddess. The Mask faded and was gone, hidden by that eerie light. After a time a voice came again, not quite Circe's, and not quite a voice, but ringing unmistakably in my mind.

It said, "The Mask is useless without the priestess, son of Jason. You know that."

I nodded. "Yes, I do know that. But if I asked for the priestess too—to mend a vow I broke long ago—"

"You were frightened of me then," the voice whispered. "Your face was white whenever you stood before Hecate's altar. Now you have found courage somewhere."

"Or knowledge," I said. "Jason believed in gods. I do not."

THERE was a pause. Then, very strangely, something like laughter.

"Son of Jason who betrayed me—I do not believe in gods either. But I do believe in certain other things, such as vengeance!" Now the soundless voice hardened.

"So. I can speak to you without words because you have been close to Hecate, in your memories. But I can do no more than that. Without a priestess to give me vital energy, I cannot leave my own place and help you. The Circe is old—too old to give me that strength. If I drew upon her, she would die.

"Nevertheless there may be a way. If you can force or trick Apollo into going to the secret place where I dwell, I can war with him. Matters do not stand as they did three thousand years ago, son of Jason. But since you will keep your vow this time—you say—then you may have the Mask. For I am tired of strife. If this ends in my own destruction, I do not care much. But it should end now."

The glow brightened.

"Phrontis tricked you. When will the eclipse begin?"

"Not for two days," I said, but my throat dried as I said it. Two days!

"Phrontis lied to you. The eclipse begins—now. Phrontis holds Cyane, who is unprotected; he holds her for a supreme sacrifice, if need be, to make Apollo turn his dark face away from Helios. As for you— three biremes wait half a league away from Aeaea, to seize you and take the Mask—and destroy it. The crew of the ship that brought you here has similar orders."

I said, "If I could dodge them, get to Helios somehow—"

"There is only one road that will get you there in time. That way lies through my world, a world beyond this one as this is beyond your own. Now—"

The green flames washed out from the alcove. They touched me—rippled beyond me. I was caught in the emerald glow.

I saw a shadow—shadow of Circe—shadow of the Mask.

The old priestess stood beside me, wearing the Mask.

And then the light tightened about us like a net, lifted us, bore us away. . . .

"See with my eyes."

The light-veils shifted, parted. . . .

"Hear with my ears."

I heard the shrieking of wind, the creak of

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cordage, the booming of sails. . . .

"'Hate with my hate!"

The three biremes of Helios tacked on the dark sea, their golden splendor dimmed. A shadow crept across the purple sky. Stars were gleaming wanly, stars that never shone on earth.

They passed and were gone. I smelled the hot, sweet reek of blood, heard the bellowing of oxen, saw the flash of the golden knives as they slit shaggy throats.

Helios!

The golden city wailed its terror to the darkening sky! Slowly, slowly, across the blazing disc of the sun there crept an arc of darkness. It thickened. And Helios faded, dimmed, its bright lustre paling as the eclipse marched across the sun's face.

A balustrade protruding from the clifflike towers of the temple. Panyr stood there, his horned head thrown back, his beard jutting stiffly forward, while the goat-yellow eyes searched the sky.

"Jason!" he called to me.

The vision passed. My sight swept on, into the heart of the temple, into enormous vaulted rooms thronged with worshippers, filled with the wail of prayers and the smell of blood.

Into a chamber I had not seen before, I went. It was walled with black. A single shaft of pure white light blazed down on an altar, where lay a figure completely shrouded by a golden cloth.

Against the wall a circle of light stood, a quarter darkened now, a lambent sun, darkening with eclipse as the sun above Helios was darkened.

Priests of Apollo stood about the altar, masked with the golden disc that concealed their features. One of them held a knife, but he hesitated, glancing again and again at the pseudo-sun upon the wall. I thought: Phrontis will not kill Cyane unless all else fails, unless Apollo of the Eclipse comes to Helios. For Cyane, heir to the Mask of Circe, is the supreme sacrifice that might appease the sun god.

The other priests chanted, and from some distant place came the chant of a great multitude in strophe and answering antistrophe.

Then came the voice of Hecate: "There is no door in Helios for us to enter. It is too late."

And Circe's voice, mingled with that of the old priestess.

"There is a way, Mother. The ancient temple to you beyond the gates. That altar still stands."

"Yet the gates of Helios are too strong."

"Call your people! And let Hecate break the walls!"

CHAPTER XII

Battling Beasts

DIMLY I had a glimpse of Panyr on his balcony, under the darkening sky. He seemed to be listening. Then suddenly he brought up a ram's horn to his lips and sent shout after brazen shout echoing from its mouth.

Summoning—what?

Panyr's horn called. But I thought that Hecate, too, was voicing a command, and her voice reached ears that the faun's horn could not. The air grew darker. But the temple torches flamed brighter and brighter as the eclipse swept softly across the land. The golden city was fading—never, I thought, to shine bright again beneath Apollo's sun!

The summons of Panyr roared forth. The call of Hecate shrilled across the crags and forests. From cavern and grove, from their woodland lairs around Helios, on swift-racing feet, the centaur-people of Hecate galloped down on the golden city!

Now the earth was solid beneath me again. The green fires shuddered, sank, and were gone. I stood with the old priestess in the midst of a moss-covered circle of rounded stones, on a forested hillside. One verdigrised boulder, larger than the others, was in the center of the circle, and on this the emerald flame still hovered.

Through the Mask the Circe spoke to me.

"Circe's old altar, without worshippers now, but still a door she can open from one world to the next."

Nor was this magic either, I told myself firmly, trying to keep a sane grip on reality in the midst of this nightmare rising like a storm about me. A—a machine, not necessarily a complicated affair of levers and pistons and vacuum tubes, but one of the simplest—a block of radioactive material buried in the altar stone, perhaps a source of power, or an anchor to hold Hecate here.

But the cold logic of science faded before

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this rout out of ancient legend. The oak boughs above us swayed and whispered in the gathering dark. The sun was half eclipsed now. And all about us was low, inhuman laughter, the clattering of hoofs, the flat, alien stare of beast-eyes.

Trembling down the wind came the crying of Panyr's horn. The Mask of Circe turned to me. The Circe gestured, called a command. I was seized in huge arms and tossed upon the broad back of a centaur.

Again the Circe shrilled an order.

The beast-army stirred into motion like an enormous pool sweeping down under the drag of a current pulling it into a single channel. Now the boughs flashed past above me. I saw gnarled hands reaching up, ripping improvised clubs from the oaks as we swept beneath. The insane beast-laughter shouted.

Darker, darker grew the air as the eclipse rushed relentlessly across the sun.

A sword-hilt was thrust into my grip. It was too heavy to be wielded except two-handed. I tried desperately to keep my seat and hold the sword at the same time. Some of the centaurs, I saw, had weapons like mine, but others held things like sickles, bright-bladed, and most of them had ripped their own cudgels from the trees.

We burst from the forest and thundered down a long slope. Far distant lay the sea, with the dimmed golden ships of Helios riding beyond the marble quay. Alien stars flamed across the black sky. Helios lay beneath us.

The inhuman roaring of the centaurs mingled with the thunderous beat of their hoofs as the horde avalanched down on Apollo's citadel!

WE SWUNG across a broad, paved road and swept past it through fields of flax that lay silver as a shining lake in our path. The wind shifted, bringing to our ears the wailing of the city's people. And down the channels of air shouted Panyr's trumpet, mindless and wordless as the voice of Pan himself, a summons that stirred raging fires deep within my blood, ancient, primal fires waking to life as the faun sounded his summons.

Jason, son of Aeson, give me your strength!

From somewhere, from the lost memories of Jason or from the faun's horn, strength came, perhaps flowing into me from that monstrous beast-body I gripped between my knees. The musky, hot reek of the herd stung my nostrils. A cold wind began to blow from the sea, and the wailing cry of Helios was drowned by the centaurs' roaring.

No longer sun-bright, no longer blazing with supernal brilliance, Helios couched dark and immobile under the black sky.

We thundered past titan gates, closed now, but higher than six men's height. We swept up to the wall itself ,towering far above our heads, and now we could not see into the city. But we could hear. We could hear chanting.

"Turn thy face from us, great Apollo.
"Turn the terror of thy dark face from Helios!
"Walk not in our streets, nor stoop above our temple. . . .
"Come not to us, Apollo, in the Hour of thine Eclipse!"

The centaurs had halted. A hundred feet away loomed the golden walls. I looked for the Circe—saw her, no longer riding a centaur, but walking—walking steadily toward the city.

I tried to swing one leg free to dismount, but a powerful arm came back to halt me.

"Wait," the centaur said, thickly in his beast-voice. "Wait."

"Circe!" I called.

She did not look back. Suddenly I knew what she meant to do. Only Hecate's power could unlock Helios to us now, and the old priestess could not summon forth the goddess, and live.

It was growing darker, darker. The centaurs stirred uneasily, their voices fell silent. I could see only a white shadow moving away from us in the gloom. But about the Masked head a lambent greenness played.

Ceaselessly the faun's horn cried from darkened Helios. Then it too fell silent. There was only the cry of that wailing chant:

"Turn thy face from Helios,
O dark Apollo!"

Circe's white shadow flung out its arms. And now in the silence, above the crying from the temple, a thin sound began to shrill. Higher and higher it rose, pitched closer and closer to the margin of perception, and then higher still. It was a sound as no mortal throat could form, but I knew from

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whose throat it came—Circe's white inhuman throat, Circe's red mouth.

The sound tore at my nerves and shuddered in my bones. It was no human voice—that voice of Hecate!

The golden walls shimmered with sudden motion in the gloom. I saw the same shudder run over them that was moving in my bones. But more violently and still more violently.

A lance of dark lightning seemed to leap across the gold. A crack appeared in the walls of Helios. Another black bolt shot out to cross it, and then another. The high walls of Apollo's city were shaking, crumbling away.

And still the voice shrilled on.

From base to top of the wall a thick black serpent seemed to run. There was low thunder groaning below the keening of that unearthly supersonic voice. Vibration, I thought. No magic, simply vibration. It can break glasses or bring down bridges if you find the tonic chord. And I remembered Jericho!

With a long, low, rumbling crash the wall crumbled. Billows of golden dust rolled up in clouds.

A centaur thundered forward and stooped in full gallop to sweep the Circe up in his arms. She lay motionless, the Mask's black curls streaming in the dimness.

THE crashing of the wall subsided into diminishing rumbles like sullen thunder. The centaurs began to move toward the wall. But it was a barrier no longer. Riven from base to top, it opened a wide gate for us now to pass into the golden city.

The crying of the faun's horn summoned us through the gap. We stampeded in a wild, shouting surge through the wall and into a street filled with wailing throngs, but their bodies made no barrier for the centaurs' murderous hoofs. I saw the dulled glimmer of golden armor. The soldiers of Helios, filling the street, marched toward us in orderly ranks, phalanx upon phalanx.

Well-disciplined, these men, but what armor could withstand the bone-cracking smashes of the centaurs' hoofs?

Unceasingly the knotted cudgels smashed down. Unceasingly the scythes of the centurs mowed a red harvest and reaped—death. The great swords swung like monstrous flails among the armored guards. And the creatures fought as horses fight, rearing, kicking, crushing in cuirass and helmet with savage, half-mindless fury.

We fought not without our own losses. The golden swords swung too, and I heard the wild, high beast-screams of hamstrung centaurs going down in a struggling heap among half a dozen soldiers, fighting furiously to the last stroke of a Helios sword.

But my own mount fought unscathed. And from his back I fought too, blind and breathless, seeing nothing but the next helmed face to swing at and the next soldier that went down—and the man beyond him stepping forward into his place.

Until at last we were on the temple steps, surging up irresistibly against the golden hordes that barred our path. But now it was fighting in the dark. Overhead only a steady, lambent ring marked the sun's corona.

We were inside the gate. We were storming up the long steps toward the encastled tower. And I saw Panyr's bearded face watching us from an outjut of the temple wall. I shouted at him and he lifted his horn high in recognition.

"Come up!" he called to us, barely audible above the uproar. "Come up to me here!"

My centaur heard. I felt his mighty body gather itself beneath me and we seemed to flow up the steps through suddenly riven ranks of the gold-mailed defenders, parted helplessly before the centaur's dripping sword. From his back I dealt with those he missed.

Panyr waved an urgent arm toward the base of the outjut where he stood.

"There's a door down there" he shouted. "Guarded—but I'll meet you inside if you can get through. Zeus, what a battle!" He grinned and vanished.

I did not need to urge my cenatur forward. We plunged around the curve of the wall and the grille of a barred door stood before us, shining within with the armor of the defenders. My centaur laughed, a brutish whinny of sound, and rose on his hind feet. I clung to the sweating human waist, feeling the terrific jolt that racked us both as his front hoofs smashed against the grille.

The gateway buckled. The centaur danced backward, came down to all-fours, reared again. I heard the shrill scream of his inhuman laughter, felt a worse jolt than before, and the gateway burst open before us.

Before I was off his back four men lay dying on the floor and the centaur's hoofs and sword dripped bloodily. He was laugh-

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ing in a half-crazy voice, hysteria and savagery mingling terrifyingly.

Then Panyr's hoofs clicked on the floor and he came around a bend of the corridor and hailed us. The centaur cried out in no human language, and Panyr replied, laughing with excitement, breathless, beckoning us on.

Thrice we met guards, and each time my sword and the centaur's terrible arsenal of weapons triumphed. Panyr himself took no part in the conflict. He stood back, watching and waiting, until we made our kill. Then we went on again.

And so we came, at last, to the garden where the Python guarded Apollo's Fleece.

CHAPTER XIII

Power Unleashed

NO TIME was left, now, for more than a glance through the shutter that closed the garden. For footsteps echoed down the corridor behind us, running hard, and the clatter of mail and weapons. From the distance came the roar of the battle around the temple walls, and above it the wailing of that infernal chant, and the darkness still seemed to be deepening over everything.

But I scarcely knew it. I had forgotten the battle and the oncoming danger behind us, and even the uncanny night-time of the Eclipse in which I must fight a battle with the gods. For the Garden of the Fleece lay before me—

And it had changed. I laid my hand on the shutter and pushed it wide. I set a knee on the sill and bent my head through the low window, and in a half-dream, scarcely knowing what I did, I stepped down into the magical garden.

That carpet of flowers that had blazed like molten stars no longer burned so blindingly. For this was the Hour of the Eclipse. They still burned, but with a curious, sickly flame that made me shrink at the thought of wading through them.

But wade I must. For there in the center of the garden swayed the tree that legend called Python, sluggish, half-asleep in the deepening darkness of the Eclipse. The great eyes of the serpent-branches turned slowly to watch me, the scaled bodies turned —slowly, slowly, like serpents in a nightmare.

Hanging among them burned the Fleece.

Then from the window behind me a sudden tumult burst. I heard Panyr shout, and I heard the wild, screaming laughter of the centaur, and the thud of his hoofs on flesh. A wave of gold-mailed men came pouring through the broad low window—and the fight was on again.

I would not have avoided it if I could. For I knew now the secret of the Python-Tree. I knew the one thing that would cast enchantment on it, as Medea had done for the other Jason, long ago.

So I stumbled back among the palely burning flowers toward the tree, swinging up my dripping sword. Across the heads of the oncoming soldiers I saw the centaur flounder across the sill and come down clumsily among the flowers, both hands gripping his weapon and the savage joy of combat in his half-animal face.

Then he struck my attackers from behind in the same moment I rushed them from the front, and for a timeless while after that, I was aware of nothing but the clash of blades and mailed bodies around me, and the desperate need to keep those golden swords away from me and to kill as many as I could.

Partly the presence of the tree helped me. My flesh crawled at the nearness of sluggish heads that stirred and lifted with hideous avidity whenever I stepped within their reach. The soldiers feared them too, and it was their fear that must have saved me from being cut down a dozen times over as we fought. For I was no hero of ancient Greece now, only Jay Seward fighting in the ghastly, pallid light of those drowsing flowers and praying that the goddess watched and could delay her hour until I was ready.

But I had no shield to protect me, and as we struggled to and fro among the burning blossoms, my blood mingled with that of the guards. And the centaur fought like a demon. There was silence except for the thud of blows and our heavy panting as we struck and stumbled and struck again—and the flowers of Apollo drank our blood.

Blood soaked the golden ground. The headless body of a guard collapsed, spouting a crimson stream. Avidly the flowers held out their cups. Avidly the petals stirred as they drank.

Among the roots of the tree the blood

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flowed and sank. And slowly, slowly the serpent heads sank too, grew lethargic, swayed and drooped as the fight raged on about those reptilian branches.

Three thousand years ago Jason tricked Medea into brewing a magic potion that would send the Python into a charmed slumber. I had seen with Jason's eyes, and I knew what the potion was. Stripped of its mystic herbs and incantations, the potion was—blood.

Even so, it was only in the Hour of the Eclipse that any human could approach this near to the tree, through the incandescence of the garden. But the right moments of the right hour were with us now, and time itself seemed to fight today for Hecate.

The Python-Tree drank and drank. Slowly it seemed to fall into a drowsy ecstasy of vampirism as its half-reptilian roots sucked up the liquor we spilled from our living bodies.

I WATCHED and waited my time. And at last, in a moment, while by common consent my opponents and I paused to draw a panting breath, I sprang suddenly backward toward the tree. The guardsman lifted his sword and plunged forward—and then suddenly hesitated, eyeing the sluggish serpents. But I did not hesitate. I knew the time was running desperately low.

The lowest branches of the tree were scaly to my grasp. I swung up among them, got a knee over the thick golden limb, clambered upward, clutching the scaled branches that writhed slowly under my hands.

Slowly the serpent-heads curved around toward me, sluggish with the blood-feast. If I had had time to think, I must have been too congealed with horror to move. But my eyes were on that shining, incredible thing glittering with a thousand lights even now, in the full glow of the garden.

I reached out an unsteady hand. I touched the Golden Fleece.

Astride a writhing branch, I lifted it from its age-old limb. A shimmering ripple of glory flowed across the Fleece as it shook in my hands, vibrant, alive, incredible.

I swung it across my shoulders like a cloak. It clung there, needing no fastening.

It was alive.

And until this moment I had been dead flesh!

Only dead guardsmen were left when I came down from the tree. All the living had fled. The centaur watched me warily, his eyes showing white like a frightened horse. Even Panyr kept a safe distance. And the flowers at my feet withered and crisped to burned embers as I walked among them.

I never knew the principle of the Fleece. Those ringlets of delicate golden wire might have been antennae, picking up energy from some unknown source, energy that poured into my body and mind and flooded me with miraculous power. Hephaestus, greatest craftsman of an inhumanly great race, had made the Fleece, and though it was a machine, it superseded a machine as the human brain supersedes the simple colloid which is its basic structure. What form of physio-psychic symbiosis made its operation possible I never understood.

I wondered if my body and mind could bear this overload long enough. For it was dangerous to wear the Fleece, but more dangerous not to, at this point. And that flooding ecstasy which the wearing of it poured through me made even the danger a delight. No man has lived at all, I thought, who has not worn the Fleece!

I went back through the window into the temple hall. Panyr stood back for me; the centaur floundered again across the sill and followed at a distance, warily, like a skittish horse. I had almost forgotten them. The walls gave back the glowing of the Fleece and sang faintly with an echo of its power.

We came out of the corridor into an enormous hall, deafening with the tumult of battle. The centaur-army had plunged this far in its invasion, and the hall was a battlefield.

But a field that parted before me and fell silent as I strode forward wrapped in the Golden Fleece. A cry of terror swept the crowd when they saw me, but I scarcely heard it. All I could hear was the faint, thin singing of the Fleece's ringlets, pouring power through my brain and body.

I followed Panyr on and on, through great rooms filled with carnage and which fell silent as we came. I think we left peace, behind us everywherre, for when these struggling masses saw the Fleece, they knew the time for human conflict had ended. The power had passed from them and it was the gods now who must meet in the final battle for supremacy.

We came at last to the threshold of that

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chamber I had seen through Hecate's eyes.

It was dim now—very dim, and full of the voices and the ceaseless swaying motion of the praying throng. Against the black walls the golden robes of the priests glowed dully. I saw the masks they wore—round sun-discs, featureless, hiding every face behind the enigmatic symbol of Apollo. And the discs glowed too, casting a strange, dim light over the crowd.

Apollo's sun-circle on the wall was no longer as I had seen it in my vision, a half-eclipsed disc. Now it was a flickering ring, like the corona in the dark sky above Helios. The Eclipse was complete.

"Turn thy dark face from us, O Apollo," the swaying throng wailed endlessly. "Look not upon Helios in the dark of the Eclipse."

ON THE altar beneath the sun-corona a golden cloth lay moulded to the curves of the body it shouded. Cyane, I thought, waiting the sacrifice. And the hour of the sacrifice must be very near—must be almost upon us.

The priests were moving and bending in ritual gestures. I knew Phrontis by his height, though the sun-disc masked his face. The chant went on, but it was rising to a climax now as the moment when blood should flow to Apollo drew near.

I stepped across the threshold.

Little rippling flashes of light flared out from the Fleece and eddied through the dark air of the temple like ripples though water. And for a heartbeat the chanting ceased and there was deathly silence in the sanctum of the sun-god. Every face turned. Even the faceless discs of the priests lifted.

Then a hushed murmuring swept the worshipers. The priests froze in their places. All but Phrontis. There was no need to see his face beneath the mask he wore. I knew how it must have convulsed with rage and terror as he sprang for the altar with one long bound. his hand going out for the sacrificial knife.

I thought the moment was not quite ripe for that sacrifice, but Phrontis could not wait any longer. He would disrupt the ceremony if need be, but he knew Cyane must die—quickly, before Hecate came for her priestess. He seized the knife. He braced himself with one hand upon the altar, swung the blade high.

Briefly it shone like a bright star in the light-ripples from the Fleece, a star that trembled and shook. From all that packed chamber there came no sound at all.

Not until that moment did I know how much the Fleece could do. Involuntarily I had started forward, throwing out one hand to stop the fall of the blade, futilely, as if my arm could reach Phrontis' wrist and halt it—

And the wrist did halt. Between my hand and his, a lance of power seemed to stretch. I felt the strong golden energy of the Fleece pour through me and I knew that among all human creatures I was a god myself now—godlike in power, godlike in the destroying violence of the Fleece.

Among gods? Well, there was time enough to test that.

Phrontis' face was hidden, but I could almost feel the panic-stricken stare behind it as he found he could not move his lifted hand. I saw the quiver of muscles beneath his robe as he strove in vain to break the frozen rigidity which the Fleece had locked upon him at the command of my miraculously augmented will.

I moved forward warily, not sure how long the spell would hold him. The throng drew back on each side, leaving me a broad aisle. I came to the altar.

Phrontis and I faced each other, for an instant motionless, across Cyane's gold-shrouded body. I wished I could see his face. I put out my hand and tossed the golden altar cloth aside.

Cyane's eyes were open, but drowned in a drugged sleep. I think she did not see me. Golden fetters locked her to the block, wrist and ankle, as she had lain once before waiting the knife.

I wound the chains about my hand and snapped them like straws. And above the metallic sound of their breaking, I heard the low thunder of hoofbeats approaching down the hall outside.

I turned to look. The centaurs were coming. And the foremost held the Mask of Circe in his two outstretched hands. The eyes were closed and I think it slept. But from lids and closed lips faint lines of green fire gleamed. Circe waited to be freed.

In a deathly silence the centaurs wound their way down the aisle that had just opened to let me by. Their hoofs fell muffled upon the floor of Apollo's sanctum. They were terrible, blood-splashed figures, still panting from the heat of combat, red drops falling with soft splashes to the floor as

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they paced slowly forward to restore the Mask of Circe from the dead priestess to the living one.

I saw Phrontis quiver with a long, convulsive shudder. He was still frozen as the power of the Fleece had caught him, knife poised above Cyane. But I knew he watched through the sun-disc across his face, and I knew the frantic emotions that must fill him as he saw all but the last of the old prophecies come true—the Fleece in Helios, the Mask and the Circe here at the sun-god's altar. There remained now only the fulfillment of the last phophecy.

The centaur circled me, still holding the Mask upon his outstretched hands. He paced to the head of the altar, where Cyane lay.

CHAPTER XIV

End of a God

STERNLY I was watching Phrontis. Now I let my hand fall, that had stricken him motionless from the full width of the temple away. And his hand fell with it, the knife clattering to the floor, very loud in that breathless silence. He lifted a trembling arm and pulled down the sun-disc so that it hung across his chest. Above it his eyes met mine.

I saw incredulous horror there, pure terror convulsing that clever face. He had not shared the superstitions of his fellows. Cold logic had solved his problems—until now. But logic and science had failed him alike in this moment and I thought I could see the shattering apart of the whole fabric that had been Phrontis' mind.

From the crowd a gasping cry went up. I turned. Cyane was rising from the altar. Cyane?

The inhuman beauty of Circe's Mask watched us, nimbused with green flame, alive, enigmatic.

And then above us all, from that corona of dim fire above the altar, the blinded sun-symbol of Apollo, a gush of sudden, intolerable heat burst forth. And with it a sound—a sound like Olympian laughter.

Phrontis swayed. I saw the look of terror change upon his face, leap into a veritable madness of new fear.

"No!" he gasped. "Apollo—no!" And almost automatically he broke into the chanting I had interrupted. "Look not upon us, O Apollo, in the Hour of the Eclipse."

The people took it up, and there was urgency in their voices now. This was no ritual prayer, but a vital cry of importuning:

"Turn thy face away, Apollo! Look not upon us in thy dark hour!"

And Apollo heard—and laughed!

I remembered what Panyr had told me of another Eclipse in which the god had looked upon his people, and none lived to say what the aspect of his dark face might be. These people were doomed to know and never to tell the tale.

Laughter rang from the darkened disc, louder and more dreadfully. And heat poured forth from it, black heat like black, invisible water, filling up the temple with an intolerable flood. Heat without light, and in it, strangely, a core of pure cold that touched only the mind.

Behind me the centaurs wheeled. I heard the low thunder of their hoofs beating out a rising tumult as they clattered from the room through the terrified crowd. Echo upon echo rolled from the ceiling and through the halls outside as they fled.

The herd was racing from doomed Helios. The priests were scattering. The people were scrambling and fighting to be free. Now even Panyr turned away, with one last long glance of the yellow goat-eyes into mine in farewell.

Only Circe and I remained—and Phrontis facing us across the altar. He had been so sure of himself. He had scorned to kneel before a god he knew was no god. But he did not know enough. Apollo was still not divine, but his powers were so far above human powers that to Phrontis now he must seem truly the god men called him.

Still that terrible heat poured out of the darkened sun-circle. And now a Face began to take shape within it. I could not look. I knew that Face in the glory of its sun-brightness, and even then it was too dreadful in its beauty for me to look upon. But Apollo's dark face— No, not even when I was armored in the Fleece would I gaze upon that sight!

Circe moved to my side, walking smoothly, surely, haloed in green light. I heard her voice, very sweet, not Cyane's voice but the Enchantress herself speaking as she had spoken three thousand years ago.

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"Hecate," she called. "Mother Hecate!"

And the goddess heard, and answered. For a pool of green light began to glimmer at our feet—began to shimmer and rise.

We stood as if in a pool of translucent water, permeated and surrounded. It seemed to rise within us as well as all about us, cool and fresh, drowning out the heat. I saw Phrontis beyond the altar. He faced the sun upon the wall. He looked Apollo in the face.

Revulsion seemed to make his very flesh crawl upon his bones, as my flesh had crawled. I saw the terrible shudders sweeping him—I saw him fall to his knees, groveling in utter abnegation before the god he had scorned. All logic and intellect stripped away, he knelt shivering before a sight no human flesh could face and remain unaltered.

"Turn thy dark face from Helios," I heard him sob the old chant that could not help him now. "Look not upon us—in the Hour—of thine Eclipse—" His voice faltered, strangled, went on in broken rhythms.

BEHIND us now the thunder of the centaurs' retreat had passed. But the screaming of all Helios had risen to a crescendo that penetrated even these sacred walls. Phrontis in that frightful torrent of unseen fire began to shrivel as he knelt.

"Stoop not above our temple."

He could not tear his blinded gaze from that Face which even I dared not look upon. Burning, blackening in the full blaze of it, he croaked his useless plea.

"Come not to us—Apollo—not to us—not—"

The voice was stilled. The golden sun-mask melted upon his chest, the golden robes blacked and fell to cinders. Phrontis was no longer there—only a shriveling shape of blackness before Apollo's dark, laughing Face.

And all around us Helios itself was dying.

For Apollo poured out the black, lightless violence of his sun-heat in an invisible torrent that not flesh and blood, not metal nor stone could resist. And I thought I knew why. Hecate stood with us before Apollo's altar, and that flood was focused upon her—upon us—the enemies of the sun.

He meant to consume us in that fearful torrent if it meant consuming all Helios too.

The green pool of radiance held us still. Apollo's might beat in vain about us, But I felt the floor shudder in that bath of flame. The temple, the city, even the earth beneath the city, shivered in the pouring energy that must be violent enough, almost, to smash the atom itself asunder.

A mounting thunder of sound spread through Helios, a shaking bellow of stone upon stone, metal shrieking upon metal, as Helios began to fall.

When a people die, the voice of their agonies is a sound no brain that hears it could ever forget. We heard those cries as Apollo's people fell before the violence of his power. But when a city dies—no language spoken by human creatures could tell of the death-roar of its passing.

Stone and steel screamed in their dissolution. Wall roared down upon wall and roofs crashed deafeningly, incredibly, in long, thundering echoes upon the defenseless heads of their builders. Earth itself shuddered and cracked beneath the titanic murdered city. Helios fell as Olpmpus itself might fall, in cataclysmic chaos.

But we were not in Helios. We were no longer in this middle world of legend but in a place of inconceivable strangeness. The green light clouded around us, and when it thinned again we stood in the unknown world of the gods!

Jason had caught glimpses of this place, three thousand years ago. He had not understood. And though I understood a little more clearly what it was I gazed on, I knew that no human mind could entirely comprehend the vast and godlike scope of this domain.

There were things around me that my eyes could not quite see. Enormous structures—mighty colossi that dwarfed anything man might build—and were machines. Vast golden things rose into the golden sky so many thousands of feet that human eyes could not see all their heights. The topless towers of Ilium, I though confusedly.

Machines they were, but at once too complicated and far too incredibly simplified for human minds to grasp. A race of demigods had built them, for the purposes of their own strange, alien kind.

A dead race! For the machines were silent. The mightiest science that ever existed, I thought, had gone down into the eternal silence of oblivion.

There were traces of what must have been battle on some of those mountainous golden walls. Some stood half in ruins, their mysterious shining interiors open to the uncom-

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prehending gaze. And some were smashed beyond all likeness to their originals. I wondered what titanic battle of the gods had raged here, and what its outcome was, millenniums ago.

A SOUNDLESS wind carried us weightlessly through that fantastic city. And far away, but coming toward us, a shining thing moved.

Hecate spoke in my mind.

"We go to meet Apollo," the voice said quietly. "He or I must be destroyed. And the Son of Jason must know the reason why, so that this time he may not be tempted to fling down his armor and flee.

"If you fail me now, you must know the price of failure.

"I will tell you the secret of Apollo.

"The time-streams crossed between two worlds more than seven thousand years ago. For awhile the twin worlds were one. And at that time our race was born—the race mankind called gods. They were not gods. They were mutations from human stock, born with strange powers, capable of a greater knowledge and a greater science than man could understand. Not all of us, but enough. Legends name them—Zeus and Aphrodite, Hera, Ares, Pluto, Hephaestus—Hecate.

"When the time-streams parted, our race moved on to the middle world, where Helios stood. We grew in power and knowledge. And in the end, we made this farther world, a place of our own, in an artificial space-time, where we were not bound by the laws of any planet.

"Here we built and here we rose to a summit of power that no race before or since has ever known. I was one of them, though not the greatest and not altogether of their blood. Even in the days of legend, the gods of Greece had little heed for mankind. Even then they were moving toward their Olympian goal, away from the world of Earth. But Hecate worked more closely with the sons of man. Necromancy and enchantment were my skills, and I needed men and women to help me. So when the race moved on, I lingered.

"And when the final battle came, I was not among the slain.

"You see, we knew we were not gods. We knew death must come for us some day, and we wished to create a race that could mount on our shoulders to a pinnacle higher than even we had ever dared to dream. So there were many experiments. Many trials. Some were partly successful. We made the centaurs, the satyrs and fauns, and the children of wood and stream. They were nearly immortal, but failures because of their taint of the beast."

The voice faltered, because now that soundless wind had swept us toward a high hill towering dimly in the golden air, and upon its height the glow that was Apollo stood waiting.

I thought I knew the hill. I had stood on it before—or Jason had.

This was that bare height upon Aeaea where the veil between two worlds hung thinly, where once before Apollo and Hecate had met in combat—and Jason fled.

Running, I had heard Apollo's terrible laughter ringing down the heights of the sky behind me. I heard it again, now. I looked through the heart of that golden blaze and saw Apollo's Face.

It was supernally beautiful. It was supernally horrible. My flesh crawled upon my bones again with the same sort of revulsion, in infinitely less degree, that many men feel in the presence of certain earth-things—snakes or spiders—that mysteriously outrage some instinct deep within us all.

Apollo was such an outrage. To the eye he was godlike, beautiful, superhumanly glorious. But something in the very soul rejected him. Something in my brain shuddered away from him, cried voicelessly that he should not be, should not exist or walk the same world as I or share the same life.

Hecate's voice took up her tale again in my mind. But I think I knew the secret of Apollo, intuitively, in my bones and nerves, even before she put it into words in my brain.

"So we tried again," she was saying. "In the half-gods we had failed. So we put aside living flesh and made Apollo."

I knew. Something in human flesh can guess when that which it confronts should not be alive. Some buried vanity, perhaps, that cries out against the aliveness of outrageously non-human things.

Apollo was too beautiful to be human. Too terrible to wear flesh. I knew before Hecate put the thought in my mind. Apollo was a machine.

"In our vanity we made our own destruction," Hecate's voice said sadly in the depths of my brain. "For our beautiful Apollo was no failure—and no success. Our desires,

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like our race, sprang from human roots. But this being we created shares no desires of ours. By the standards of our race and yours, he is not sane. Or perhaps it's we who are insane—before the terrible sanity of the machine.

"We made him too strong. And he destroyed us. There was a mighty battle long ago, a battle that raged for millenniums, but in the end—you see. All of my kind are dead now except—Hecate. And Apollo walks among the ruins of our world.

"Well, he must die. Before he slew the last of the gods—Hephaestus, our greatest artisan—the Fleece was woven for Apollo's destruction. It can slay him. He knows that. But no god—no one of my race dares wear the Fleece. Death I do not fear—but death while Apollo lives would mean final defeat for all my people dreamed. I cannot die while our last deed lives on unchecked.

"So you wear the Fleece, Son of Jason. You know what you must do."

Yes, I did know.

I glanced once at Circe—the inhuman loveliness of that alabaster face, red-lipped, long, green-burning eyes meeting mine, and then I turned away from her toward Apollo.

CHAPTER XV

Music From the Sea

QUICKLY, for one flashing instant I saw his Face again, beautiful as a machine is beautiful, cold, swayed by emotions I had no name for because until this moment I had never looked upon the emotion of a machine—a living machine that sees its doom approach.

I went forward one step—two—and then the Face dissolved in a glare that was like looking straight into the heart of the sun itself. Apollo called down the ravening violence out of heaven to shield himself against me and I felt the terrible heat of it swallow me up in a bath of freezing flame.

I smiled to myself. I knew that was a two-edged weapon—if I could endure the heat a moment longer. For I knew how to use the Fleece as Haphaestus meant it to be used—and Apollo the Machine was doomed before it.

Hephaestus must have delved deep into the secrets of the electron and the sources of energy. Apollo, being machine, could be destroyed by a machine, and the Fleece was simply that. Apollo was not alive as flesh lives—he drew his life from the source of solar energy, tapping the sun itself for the tiniest fraction of its strength, which was still enough to consume cities in one breath if he chose to release a part of it upon mankind.

But he drew upon the sun continuously. It poured its golden stream through him in a ceaseless torrent, the excess power dissipating harmlessly into the shining air of this superworld.

The Fleece could seal all that power inside him. And not even Apollo could contain such a pouring flood for long. Hecate, I think, drew her own strength from some such source, which was why she dared not wear the Fleece against Apollo. Only a human could wear it, and live to cast it off again.

As I cast it off.

It quivered against my shoulders one last moment, the delicate ringlets of golden wire shivering all around me. Then I touched it and it clung obediently to my grasp as Hephaestus made it to cling so very many generations ago. This machine obeyed as Apollo the Machine could not and must die because of it.

I stripped the Fleece from my shoulders—spun it out away from me in midair—sent it flying across the dazzling space I could not look into without blindiness.

Burning gold though the Fleece was, it looked black in that blaze. Without Hecate's mist enfolding us, I know we must both be vaporized into mist in that incredible crucible of fire which Apollo had called down from the sun itself for protection.

As the super-race in its efforts had created its own doom, so Apollo the Machine created his when he called forth that terrible fire. And so, I think, does every living thing, even though it may live by grace of energy from the sun itself, like Apollo.

The Fleece struck and clung. For an unthinkable instant the full violence of that tiny sun-fraction upon which he drew poured down into the beautiful machine that had been a god. Poured down—and built within him an unspilling pool of power.

Apollo for that moment was a vessel that held the sun itself, and in such fire as that, nothing could endure for longer than the flash of a second.

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How can I say what happened then? How can I describe in any human tongue how it was Apollo died?

I remember Circe's lovely pale face close to mine for one spinning instant, the deep red lips parted on a cry I could not hear. I remember how the hill we stood on seemed to vanish from underfoot and the sky above us turn to flame.

And then I was floundering in salt water. . . .

I was alone, and misty gray waves tossed me over and over, strangling, helpless. I went down twice, far down. I felt naked without the power the Fleece had poured into me, and weak as a child with the reaction from that tremendous battle.

But just as I thought I could fight no more against the engulfing waves, I heard a whispering, bubbling rush very near me, and something lifted me up—a great wave, or perhaps inhuman hands.

I could breathe again, and beneath me was a solid deck that rose and fell with the motion of the water.

Music sang in my ears. I heard the creak of oars and the whine of cordage in the wind, and the slap of water against a familiar prow.

With an almost intolerable effort I lifted myself on one arm. Ghostly in the gray mist I saw the Argonauts bending to their oars, and heard the lyre of Orpheus singing in the fog.

I could not remember even falling back upon the deck after that. I remember nothing at all—nothing at all. . . .

* * * * *

THE campfire had died hours ago. Mist was creeping down through the pines, and when Seward's voice paused, the only sound was the soft washing of the sea.

Talbot said softly, "And then?"

"And then—I was lying on a beach, and it was night," Seward said. "There were lights in the distance. Somehow I got that far before I passed out again. I was in a little town on the Oregon coast." He shrugged. "It could have been hallucination. How I got from this spot down to Oregon overnight I can't understand. A plane could do it, but why the devil— No, I'm not skeptical any more. I know it wasn't hallucination."

Talbot said, "Well, we've gone far enough into the sciences to realize how little we know. Everything that you tell about is theoretically possible, I suppose—super-race and all. All but the *Argo*."

Seward nodded. "And yet," he said, "the odd thing is that *Argo* is the one thing I'm surest of. It's more real to me than Hecate or Aeaea, or even—Cyane."

Talbot said gently, "Cyane?"

Seward shook himself with an impatient motion. "It isn't over," he said. "Cyane—Circe—one woman or two, I don't know. But there was a promise at the start of it all, and the promise wasn't kept. So I can't rest. I

"Nsharra Is the Daughter of Kree, Guardian of the Brotherhood—the Enemies of My People!"

SHAN KAR spoke the words with brooding slowness. "We must go swiftly to L'Lan," he added, "if we are ever to reach the valley. The Brotherhood is striking at us—now!"

Eric Nelson listened with increasing bewilderment. Shan Kar had hired him and his group of soldiers of fortune to do battle—holding forth precious platinum as payment. Platinum that was more than plentiful in L'Lan, a strange Tibetan valley where animals thought like men and men lived in danger of becoming beasts. . . .

Then Nsharra, the beautiful witch-girl whose companions were a stallion, a wolf and an eagle, had appeared before Nelson as if from nowhere . . . and vanished. And the news of her presence seemed very significant to Shan Kar, for some reason Nelson could not fathom.

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can't settle down to anything in this world. I know it isn't over yet, you see. Unless Hecate died, too.

"Well, an adventure like that happens only once to a man. Or—if he had two lives—then perhaps twice. I don't know. I know it wasn't hallucination. I know I'm not insane because I remember it so clearly. And I know Hecate will fulfill her promise, some day, some day. . . ."

He shrugged and rose. "I've talked enough. It'll be dawn soon. I'm tired."

Talbot lay sleepless for a long time, staring up at the stars among the pine tops and thinking. He thought of Jason and of Jay Seward, and of the origins of names and men. *Argo,* plowing the misty seas, warden of those waters that lap nameless shores. Warden of the seas—Sea-ward—Jay Seward—

He slept. . . .

The faint echo of music woke him just before dawn. It was very dark here among the trees. And he was alone. He felt that uncannily in the blackness as he sat up, ears straining for another echo of the distant music. It came. Talbot got up and took a step toward the echoing sound.

It came from the water. He walked slowly down the slope, past Seward's empty sleeping bag, listening and watching the dark for signs of another moving figure that answered, too, to distant music.

Far ahead of him he thought he heard a splashing above the ceaseless lap of waves on the shore. It was too distant to be sure. Talbot broke into a run and this time he called:

"Seward! Seward, where are you?"

Only silence and the sea replied.

He ran until the sand of the water's edge slowed his footsteps, and the waves rolled in where he halted to stare out across the dark water. Something moved there—a dim shape, long and slender, lying upon the water like—a ship? He never knew. The fog closed in too fast, and only the sea spoke.

Then a ripple of wordless music floated back along the wind, and Talbot shouted once more, for the last time: *"Jason! Jason!"*

There was no answering cry. The shadow in the mists glided away and was itself only mist. Talbot stood silent, watching, listening for an answer that would never come. The gray fog closed down, billow upon billow, and there was nothing left but darkness and the slow, soft sound of the moving sea.

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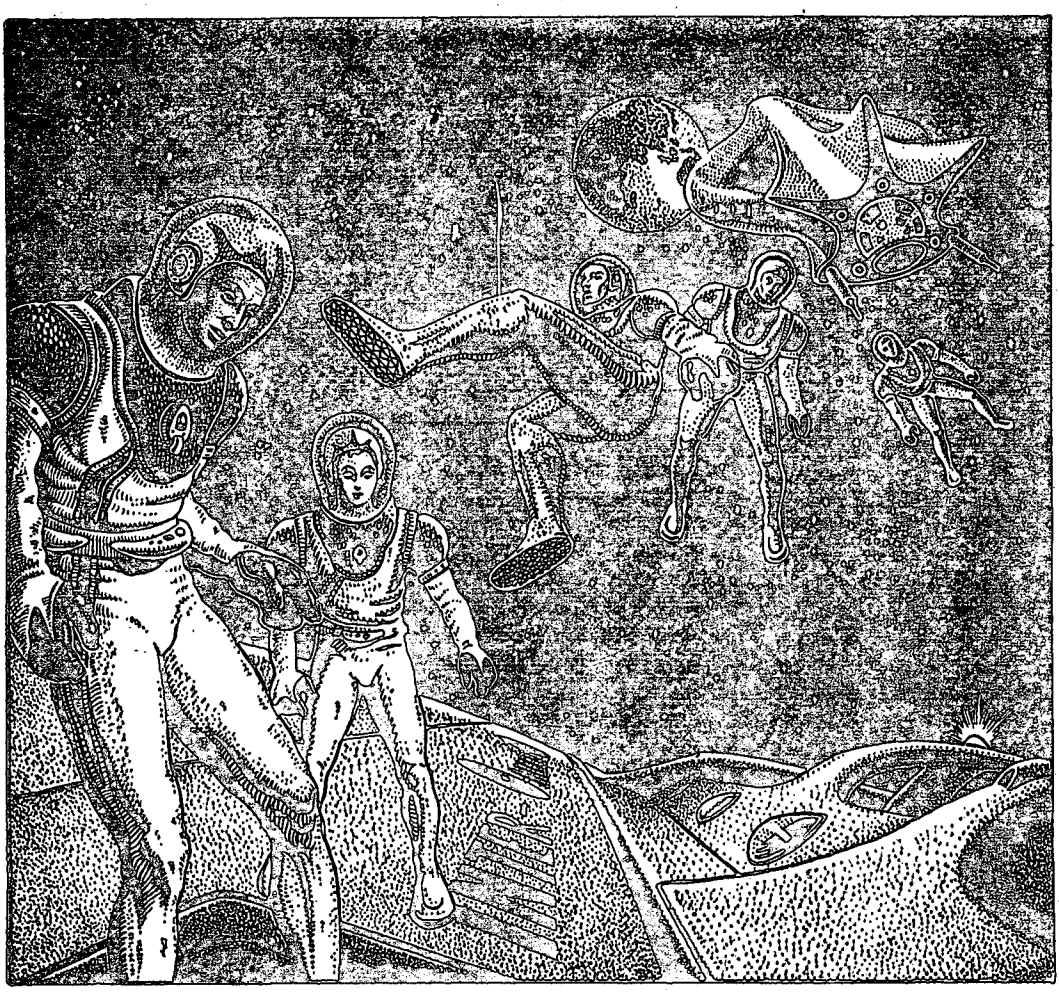

The space suits which Hubert had invented worked perfectly

THE SIMPLE LIFE

By RAY CUMMINGS

When Earth life grows too complicated for Professor Hubert Blaine and his pretty wife Dora, they flee into outer space!

PROFESSOR HUBERT BLAINE leaned back in his pneumatic pivot-ball desk chair and contemplated the inescapable fact that the world was going to the dogs. That was his considered opinion. Nor had he reached it hastily. Thinking about it now, he realized that very possibly it had grown within him throughout all his thirty-five years of life. The world was going to the dogs and there was nothing anybody could do about it. In fact, there didn't seem to be anybody but himself who realized it, or cared.

And, he contemplated bitterly, it was so

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unnecessary. As someone had once said, good old Mother Earth was fine. There was nothing at all the matter with the world, it was the people in it that caused the trouble. Life was getting too full of too many things. Too complex. Everybody was working like blazes, struggling to reduce everything to complexity.

Professor Hubert Blaine sighed, ran impatient fingers through his sparse sandy hair and adjusted his old fashioned rimless spectacles as he gazed frowningly through his plastic window at the city ramps crowded with hustling, feverish pedestrians. Life was no good any more, and Professor Blaine, having only this one life to live, was bitter about it.

Once things had been fine. Up until not so very long ago either. Only ninety-five years ago, at the turn of the century, they had had what was called the gaslight era. He remembered his grandfather telling about it, and it seemed very nice. A little hectic compared to George Washington's time maybe, but certainly nothing like now.

In the gaslight era, a horse and carriage got you where you were going fast enough, but not any more. Nothing got you there fast enough. The accent was on speed, and more speed.

Why?

On Professor Hubert Blaine's desk, here in the busy Government Research Laboratory, a buzzer sounded. The little Inter-lab televizor lighted with the image of the call-girl's face.

"The time is seven P.M., Professor."

"Eh? Oh, yes. Thank you."

He disconnected hastily, grabbed his hat, dashed for the lab-roof where his 'copter was racked. In eight minutes he was due home. Dora would expect him even a minute or two sooner than that, because by the time he shaved, bathed, and they allowed their usual sixteen minutes for dinner, they would be late flying to Stamford for the regular Friday night card game with the Holloways.

FORTUNATELY the wind was in Professor Blaine's favor tonight, and the southern Westchester towerman, whom he had sweetened with a nice tip only last week, let him use the crowded northbound lower level so that he gained a full minute. He was really a little ahead of time as he set his 'copter down in the community garden of his suburban home and grabbed the ascending escalator to the tenth floor balcony outside their apartment.

Dora was waiting for him on the balcony. Professor Blaine's wife was twenty-five, slim and pretty, with fluffy blond hair. Her short skirt and trim bodice of glistening blue nylene were extremely becoming. Her face was flushed in the warmth of the summer evening. Professor Blaine gazed at her appreciatively.

"Every night you're more beautiful," he said as he kissed her.

"Am I?" Her embrace was warm, but brief. "Oh, Hubert! The most wonderful thing—Clarice just called me. She says, if we can make it fast and arrive maybe ten minutes ahead of time, we'll have a full hour at the game. See, Janice called her a half hour ago."

"Janice?" he said.

"Sure. You remember Janice Kenton. She divorced her husband last week."

"Oh," he said. "Up in Boston."

"Yes." Dora was shoving him into the apartment, helping him off with his jacket. "Hurry, darling. I've got your bath water running. My goodness, you do need a shave. Please don't be disappointed, but I decided I just wouldn't have time to cook us anything tonight, so I ordered some synthetic stuff from the public supply company. It'll be—"

A buzzer at the living room panel of automatic tubes sounded. The synthetic stuff already was arriving.

"What about Janice?" Professor Blaine asked. Dora had shoved him into the bathroom by now.

"She's having friends in to celebrate her divorce," Dora said. "So when we get through the card game, Clarice and Tom are flying us up there, and Janice says after the celebration, see, she's just having four men in for a few drinks, then maybe we can go to a new place that opens at midnight in Boston, for dancing."

Professor Blaine came out of the bathroom and sat down abruptly in the little glass swing seat of the living room.

"I'm not going!" he said.

"Not—*what!*"

"Not going," he said.

Dora stared with widening baby blue eyes. "Not—not going to Boston!" she exclaimed.

"Not going to Boston," he said. He didn't say it nastily, just firmly. "Not going to Stamford. Not going anywhere." He stretched his feet out on the glistening rug. It was

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very nice to have time to stretch your feet out. "Not going anywhere," he repeated. "Not until eight-seventeen tomorrow morning, when I return to the lab."

"Oh, Hubert!"

He crossed his ankles and wiggled his feet luxuriously. And then he grinned. He had a nice, warming grin. He was a big, rangy fellow, a little bookish-looking, but not too much.

"So you'd better get busy, Dora, and put through a lot of calls and tell everybody nothing doing."

"Oh, Hubert!"

"And throw that synthetic stuff away." He cast a look of repugnance to where his prospective evening meal which lay in its shiny greased cylinder, by the pneumatic tube.

"But Hubert dear, what'll I tell everybody? We're not sick."

"Tell them maybe we would be, if we went," he said. Then he reached out, caught at his wife and drew her to his lap. Dora was naturally startled, because this was the wrong time of the twenty-four hour day for things like that. But by natural instinct she was the cuddling type. Despite her surprise, she cuddled, and he kissed her again. In fact, several times.

"Oh, Hubert, dear."

"And besides," he said, "I've lots of things I want to explain to you tonight. Things I've been thinking of a long time."

"Oh," she said. "Something important?"

"Very," he said. "Very important. Things that life has forced me to realize, even before we were married."

THAT hadn't been very long. Dora and Hubert had, in fact, just returned from their honeymoon last week. It had been a hectic honeymoon, what with Dora's televized calls to so many friends. She and Hubert had no immediate family, which perhaps was in a way fortunate as friends were bad enough. So many friends flew in to whoop things up, no matter where in the world Dora and Hubert went. That was the matter with the world now. It had shrunk because no place on it was further than a few hours from any other place.

"So after dinner we'll have a nice long talk," Hubert added with another kiss. "By the way, you'd better put through some local calls and see if you can get some regular food sent us. There ought to be plenty around, in some of the markets. And then cook us a nice regular meal. I've never forgotten that one you cooked me the night we got engaged." Hubert had the instincts of a diplomat, and he exhaled elaborately. "Ah, that was superb!"

"Oh, Hubert, darling." She cuddled closer. "I'll have it all ready by eight o'clock."

"Or eight-thirty," he said. "Or if it's late and we don't get it till quarter of nine, I don't give a hang."

That next hour while Hubert sat with outstretched legs, doing nothing, was glorious. Life had forced him into sudden rebellion, and so far all was well. The evening meal was hot, savory, wonderful, and it took eighteen minutes longer than normal to eat it. After eating, they sat together on the tiny terrace-balcony outside the living room. It was a wonderful summer night. You could see a little ribbon of blue sky between the out-jutting wings of the big apartment building. Hubert counted nine stars, which was a record.

Dora, naturally, was puzzled. "Something important," she said, after she had watched Hubert while he was counting the stars aloud and smoking thoughtfully. "What was it, Hubert?"

"Listen," he said. "At long last I've been inescapably forced to the conclusion that modern life has become idiotic. Besides, I don't like it. And in addition, it's dangerous."

"Dangerous, Hubert? Why, Clarice was telling me, somebody told her the latest statistics on 'copter accidents—"

He waved that away. And then he plunged into the science of it. Modern progress was building, in fact already had built, a civilization beyond the safe capabilities of the human body to live it. Even way back in '47, some fifty years ago, one of the great leaders of the medical profession had warned of it. Life had speeded up into such complexity that the physical makeup of man could not keep pace with it. After all, physically, man was changing not very much—not in the span of a hundred years or so.

A distinct danger was looming, the danger that man would build a world, an inexorable way of life, in which he couldn't survive.

"You see," Hubert was saying, "as that physician back in 'Forty-Seven remarked, we're fooling ourselves. We think we're training ourselves to the noise and the rush, the eating of meals standing up, and food that's no good. We think we're hardened by

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practise to the strain of high-speed modern existence. But we're not. If that was true in 'Forty-Seven, imagine the damage done since."

He warmed to his subject. Under the stress of emergency the adrenal glands pour out additional adrenalin, and anyone can rise to surprising endurance, as a temporary thing. Nature made it that way, so that man, imperiled, could extricate himself and survive the emergency.

But modern life now draws on adrenalin, not as a temporary measure, but a permanent need. The result is a damage to the nervous system. Not a small, temporary damage which nature can repair, but a permanent deterioration. An irreparable deterioration.

"In other words," Hubert was saying, "man's nervous system is breaking down. And it's inheritable, so that in each generation we are worse off. Then science springs into the breach with sedatives. Bigger and better sedatives. That's the slogan. And psychiatry."

Hubert remembered reading about the post-war period of 'Forty-Six to 'Sixty. Someone had said, "What this country needs is a good five-cent psychiatrist." Then had come the wave of calling for psychiatrists to fix you up.

"It's nothing at all but the nerve-strain of life," Hubert said. "And they had the atom bomb to worry about then, which made it worse. We're used to that now, only minor wars, so that now we think less about killing each other. Instead, we're all very busy killing ourselves. It would be ironic, wouldn't it, if mankind finally succeeded in building a civilization too complicated for the human body to endure?"

DORA was staring at her husband wide-eyed. "Oh, Hubert," she said when he paused for breath. "Oh, Hubert, darling, I just love you when you talk like that. It sounds so important, so learned."

Dora, indeed, was not an Independent Thinker. And she adored Hubert. Everything that Hubert ever said, even if she couldn't understand it, had to be right. She cuddled closer.

"It's terrible, isn't it?" she said. "Hubert, honey, whatever are you going to do about it?"

Hubert knew what he was going to do about it. The thing had been vaguely in his mind for a long time, and now he had decided to start doing it at once. But he knew he was right when he concluded that Dora had absorbed enough scientific thinking for one evening. In fact, there wasn't any need to shock her by telling her anything in advance of its actual accomplishment.

"Besides," he said, "even if we were willing to go on making nervous wrecks of ourselves, it's no fun." He kissed her again. "It isn't, is it?" he said.

"No, it isn't I mean, yes it is fun being kissed, darling. Is that what you mean?"

He skipped it. He was counting the stars again in the ribbon of sky between the wings of the building. "Only nine," he said.

He sounded very bitter. . . .

In the Government Research Laboratories, where Professor Hubert Blaine was in charge of one of the important divisions in the branch of Industrial Research, they were sorry when he demanded to be laid off without pay for an indefinite period. Fortunately Hubert was rich, both in cash and Government credits, and he could afford this impending nervous breakdown which he pleaded was upon him.

"Well, you have been pretty busy," his haggard boss told him. "Knock off and have a good time for a while. Look, why don't you get a bigger 'copter, Hubert? Take another trip—sort of a second honeymoon. In a bigger craft you could take some friends too."

"Thanks." Hubert shuddered. "Thanks, thanks a lot."

"That's what I'm planning to do," his boss said enthusiastically. "On my vacation in October I only get fourteen days, though I ought to have seventeen, with what we really have to do."

Thanks," Hubert said. "I see what you mean."

Dora too, was bothered when Hubert said he wasn't feeling well.

"But I'll be home every evening," Hubert said. "Almost every evening anyway. I just have to be alone for a while in the daytime. Don't you worry. Worry just uses up more adrenalin."

"All right, Hubert."

"I'll get it done quick as I can," Hubert said as he kissed her good-by, that first day of his vacation.

His remark was puzzling, but Dora didn't question him.

It took Hubert more than a year to complete his task, and it cost him a great deal of time and money, but that didn't bother him

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at all. Professor Hubert Blaine was a very learned, very clever scientist. His father had been an even greater one, perhaps, and often Hubert contemplated wryly that he and his father had done their bit in creating this monstrous modern world. And now Hubert was drawing upon it all—discoveries which his father had made; scientific principles which he and his father had secretly worked out, and which they had never finished because of the press of other work. What they had planned wasn't really needed by the world. Not now, not yet. Plenty had been written about it for a hundred years past, but no serious scientists had really cared to progress in that direction.

But Hubert was progressing now. His secret project was intended just for himself and Dora. She would be thrilled, or at least, he hoped so. And then came the big day, the exciting day, when he was ready to take Dora and show her the finished product of his labors, his genius.

"Something I've been working on," he said. "Something important to us. We'll take the 'copter this evening and I'll show you."

"I knew you've been working, not resting," she said. "You look so tired, Hubert dear, and I've missed you so much."

There had been weeks at a time when he had not come home.

"It's finished," he said. "I won't be away from you any more, Dora."

THEN that evening, in the pale October moonlight, they flew far up into the mountains, and at last he and Dora stood muffled in their gleaming gray greatcoats, on a ramp of the rocky crags, and he watched her face as her eyes widened and she stared at the thing he had built.

It lay there in its scaffolding at the bottom of its launching chute, a glistening oval pancake object of fifty feet or so, with vents and portals and tiny rows of bullseye windows—a blunt-nosed craft, fantailed, with the pancake shape at its bulging middle.

"What is it?" Dora murmured.

"Our spaceship," Hubert said. "We're going on a trip."

It was like viewing some new and intricately wonderful model of 'copter and telling her that they were going to Antarctica. Only more so.

"A trip?" Dora murmured. "Just you and I? I've missed you so much, Hubert." Dora loved to travel. "Where are we going, Hubert? Somewhere off the Earth? How wonderful! I've read of things like that, but nobody ever did it before, did they? I must call Clarice at once. Won't she be envious? And she was boasting just the other night that she and Tom have been almost everywhere on Earth. I must call her at once."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," Hubert said. "Understand that! Nothing of the kind! You'll say nothing about this."

"Oh. All right, Hubert darling, if you say so."

"It's our secret," he said. "We'll sneak away, find some nice quiet little place on some other world where we can rest up for a while. We'll just say nothing. I don't want people messing into this affair, trying to make it intricate."

"Just like a second honeymoon," she murmured. "Oh, Hubert, how romantic? Where are we going? How long will we be gone?"

Hubert himself was a little vague on that. But the destination could come later.

Then presently the *Starbrite* was carefully provisioned for a long trip if need be, and with extras for any undue emergency. Hubert had provided several devices also for making synthetic foods, including the latest developements in growing of yeast-spores as a rich source of protein. Hubert himself was an expert on that, for it had been, for the past few years, a considerable part of his routine work at the Government Research Laboratories.

And the *Starbrite's* rocket engines were ready. The myriad mechanisms which Hubert and his father had worked out in principle, were here in practical form at last. The heating system against the absolute-zero cold of Interplanetary space was a miracle of efficiency. Hubert was proud of that heating system. He displayed it to Dora with enthusiasm.

"Hubert, you're wonderful," Dora said.

But Dora wisely didn't try to comprehend all the intricacies of the necessities of life which Hubert had installed. She didn't know about the tiny quantities of basic chemicals, out of which other chemicals could be made for the making of water or the air renewers, pressure controls and so many other things. But the miraculously little compact washing machine, the starchers, and the tiny electronic iron, those indeed she could appreciate.

"Pretty neat, eh Dora?"

"Hubert, you think of everything."

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The start, that clear, moonlit November night, was thrilling. They had sneaked away together, from their little tenth floor Westchester apartment, ignoring three or four buzzers which were calling them, and had flown the 'copter to Hubert's hideout in the Northern Mountains. Then they had hidden the 'copter, climbed into the waiting *Starbrite* and were off.

The start, as they slid upward with the jets roaring behind them, was a wonderful sensation. It was too bad they blacked out before they reached the stratosphere. Hubert hadn't anticipated that anything like that would happen. A little miscalculation. Whatever it was, it happened, and when Hubert came to himself he was on the grid-floor, with Dora beside him. Dora had just regained consciousness, and she was horribly worried because he hadn't.

"Hubert, are you all right now?"

BUT they weren't either of them all right. Hubert became aware of that, as soon as he became aware of anything. He was too hot. So was Dora. Both of them lay panting, bathed in perspiration.

"Dora," he gasped. "Dora there's something wrong. It's too hot in here"

The Max.-Min. thermometer stood at 112° F. It had been 126° F., but now it had receded. Of course! The starting acceleration had been greater than he figured, and this heat was caused by the atmospheric friction. But they were well past that now, so that the temperature was lowering. Soon Hubert's heating system would have to be turned on, to protect them from the coldness of space.

He explained it all to the panting Dora. They were already some ten thousand miles from the Earth's surface, a trajectory so that they were partially rounding the Earth, so to speak, counterwise to its orbital rotation. Through one of the bullseye windows to which they staggered they could see the Earth down there now, a monstrous dull-red globe, edged with silver-sunlight on the mountains down one side, and much of its northern hemisphere patched and mottled with winter clouds.

Everywhere else was the dark black firmament of Interplanetary Space, strewn with glittering stars. The stars gave Hubert a very singularly peculiar satisfaction. Not just nine stars, but billions.

"We're all right now, Dora."

She listened to his explanation, and nodded. "Of course, Hubert." She wiped her streaming forehead with a section of her flowing sleeve. "Of course, we're—all right."

But her faith in her husband's infallibility certainly was being put to a most horrible test. Because the thermometer didn't continue to recede. Far from it, for as Hubert stared, unbelieving, the damnable mercury rose. 113° F. 114° F. Hubert shuddered, covered his eyes, and when he next looked, it was 119°. Then 120°.

Of what use was a heating system here? Dora may have thought of that, but she didn't mention it.

Then like a brilliant meteor flashing out of the abyss of empty space, Hubert understood the trouble. For a hundred years, scientific writers, theorizing on Space-travel, had planned to guard against the deadening cold of interplanetary space, that absolute zero of frigidity. Hubert's father had thought of it like that, and so, naturally, had Hubert. "The best laid plans of mice and men!" The words of the famous poet came to Hubert with a stab of irony. All that sort of reasoning was totally wrong.

Space is a vacuum. A perfect vacuum, surrounding the tiny *Starbrite* with a completely perfect insulation! No heat, absolutely none, could escape from this tiny interior! The heat of their own bodies, the friction of their movements—the heat of the moving parts of their ship's mechanisms; the ventilating system, the air renewers; the heat generated by any chemical reactions of anything Hubert might do here in the making of synthetic foods—all of it was penned in here, inescapably.

And above all, there was the heat of the ship's engines!

124° F. No, it was 125° now! He and Dora were slowly roasting to death, here in this oven so perfectly insulated by the vacuum of Space. Not roasting so slowly either, because already it was 129° F.

"Hubert, what are we going to do?" Dora gasped, when he had explained it to her.

"I'll have to shut off the motors," he said. "Nothing else to do."

The motors were the great preponderance of the heat, of course. For the rest, he was sure he could rig up some device with the chemicals on hand, to give a measure of refrigeration. Enough to reduce this temperature—with the motors permanently off—to at least a comfortable range. . . .

The mechanics of Interplanetary Space are

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very marvelous, consisting of a nicety of balance which everything so automatically secures and so eternally maintains. With the motors off forever, the little *Starbrite* hurtled onward at a velocity which now was constant. A hypobolic trajectory, partially rounding the Earth.

NOW the Earth's gravitational pull was slowly converting the trajectory into a parabola. For what could have been a week of Earth-time, Hubert gloomily calculated it. Their orbit was a parabola, but it was closing. And then, with a balancing of their centrifugal force against the gravitational pull, at last they reached an ellipse. An elliptical orbit, almost, but not quite a circle, with the gravitational center of the Earth at one of its two foci.

Like an infinitesimally tiny satellite, the *Starbrite* was doomed forever to encircle its mother planet!

That is to say—unless Hubert did something. But what? For a month of Earth-time he pondered it, day and night so to speak. They were marooned here. They couldn't go on to their planned destination, and they couldn't go back home.

"Hubert, you've just got to get us out of here!" Dora said.

It was peculiarly unfortunate, because little Drago was due to arrive in only 114 days now. . . .

He was a cute little baby, perfectly healthy, and his arrival caused no trouble, because the one thing Dora knew a lot about was obstetrics. He was a nice baby, and it was immediately apparent that he was exceedingly intelligent, probably with a scientific bent, but Hubert couldn't give that as much enthusiastic thought as he would have liked, because he was still very busy getting them out of here and back to Earth.

After all, as Dora said, a child needs more than you could give it on the *Starbrite*. Drago's birthright entitled him to decide for himself, when he was old enough, just what sort of life he wanted to live.

Hubert was doing his best to get them back home. He had made a little progress, but not much. He had devised a heliograph, so that in the hours when the sunlight was on the ship, he could flash his tiny beam, in the Morse-Heaton code, and hope that someone down on Earth would see it.

H-E-L-P G-E-T U-S O-U-T O-F H-E-R-E

Patiently he flashed it. "Get us out of here."

And then at last came the answer—a little beam from Earth, flashing up:

"How Can We Get You Out of There? How Did You Get There?"

It seemed an intricate job, answering that last question. Patiently, hour after hour, day after day, Hubert flashed down the intricate details of the principles involved in the building of the *Starbrite* so that they could build another ship to come to the rescue. He told them all his secrets, everything, with particular stress on the need for eliminating heat hazards.

There was so much to tell, indeed, that Hubert wasn't half through it when Drago arrived. But doggedly Hubert kept right on until there was completely nothing left that he could think of to explain. It was a slow process, sending all that in the Morse-Heaton code, letter by letter. Drago was going on five years old when Hubert finished.

"And I hope they have the brains to understand it," he told Dora when he had completed the job.

In between times, when the helio from here couldn't be operated, or clouds obscured the Earth's reception, Hubert worked to educate Drago. At five, Drago was very precocious. An Independent Thinker, like his father.

"It wasn't very nice of you to stick me up here, where I can't see anything, or do anything, or have any fun or anything," Drago said.

"Don't worry, I'll get you back," Hubert assured him.

"Don't look from here like there's all the things goin' on down there that you tell me about," Drago said.

"Oh you'll see—you'll see," Hubert assured him.

Little Drago was seven, tall and straight and handsome, when the rescue ship came. The space suits, which Hubert had invented, and described by helio, worked perfectly to transfer them from the doomed *Starbrite* to the rescue ship. Then they dropped back to Earth. It was a crash landing, not Hubert's fault, because the officious Commander of the Inter-Allied Rescue Commission thought he knew everything, and Hubert's warnings went unheeded. It was a pretty bad crash, and when Hubert and Dora recovered consciousness there was nothing here but wreckage of the rescue ship and nobody alive but

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themselves and little Drago.

"Well!" Hubert said, when at last he could talk. "That's that."

IT WAS exciting, getting back home—with Drago. Clarice and Tom were thrilled; so were all their other friends, and Drago, being deprived of Earth-life for his first seven years, had to have it made up to him now. He had to be taken everywhere and shown everything.

Hubert was very busy.

He was very busy also with his work at the Government Research Laboratories. There was some talk that Hubert should be put in charge of a Commission to engage in the building of a big Spaceship. But the atom bomb was causing some trouble again, and an International tension was growing. What with that and a number of other things, the Spaceship project was set aside.

Drago was very busy also, with his education which he completed when he was fifteen, and after that, with several scientific problems of his own, which, because he was an Independent Thinker, he had no trouble in creating. Dargo loved to be busy. He was soon so busy that Dora and Hubert hardly ever saw him.

"After all, father and mother are pretty old-fashioned, you know," Drago told his girl friend. "We haven't much in common."

It was just about then that Hubert resigned from the Government Labs, and began being away from home a great deal.

"I know what you're doing," Dora said. "But Hubert darling—"

"I am," Hubert said.

They called it *Starbrite Two*. It was quite a bit larger than its predecessor and it had a great many things in it, just for Dora, including a tiny patch of chemicalized loam where you could grow food, and flowers. And it had no heating system.

Hubert was sure of his destination, this time. They headed for the Moon.

"How long will we be gone?" Dora said, as they started. "Let's take a nice trip."

"We will," Hubert assured her.

"And don't let's start so fast, like we did before."

"No," Hubert agreed. "I've got that all figured out."

It was a grand trip, with nothing going wrong at all. They didn't plan to land on the Moon. It looked lonely enough, but too bleak, and the lack of air would make it inconvenient, even for a short visit.

The Moon was a beautiful sight as they rounded it, at an altitude of perhaps five thousand miles—glittering white, with dark mottling on the Mare Imbrium, and the huge crater of Archimedes looming up frowningly beside it. Hubert pointed out all the sights.

"Oh, I just love it," Dora said.

They were in the trajectory of almost an ellipse, rounding the Moon twice so that Dora could see everything, when the engine fuel gave out. The motors went dead.

Certainly there was nothing that Hubert could do about that. With balanced forces, the little *Starbrite Two* swung onward, silently, in its eternal little orbit around the Moon.

"Well," Hubert said. "We're stuck here. Marooned." He looked very grave, but somehow his eyes were twinkling.

"Hubert!" Dora said. "You knew perfectly well the fuel would give out when we got here."

"Could be," Hubert said. He kissed her. Then he kissed her again.

"Oh, my, goodness," Dora said. "Oh, Hubert darling—"

Maybe you have a fair-sized telescope? If you have, take a look at the Moon some clear night. If you look carefully, and long enough, you'll probably see a tiny speck crossing the Moon's face. That's Hubert and Dora. Don't feel sorry for them. They're very happy. They're living the simple life.

Coming Next Issue

WHEN THE EARTH LIVED

A Hall of Fame Novelet

By HENRY KUTTNER

Plus Many Other Stories

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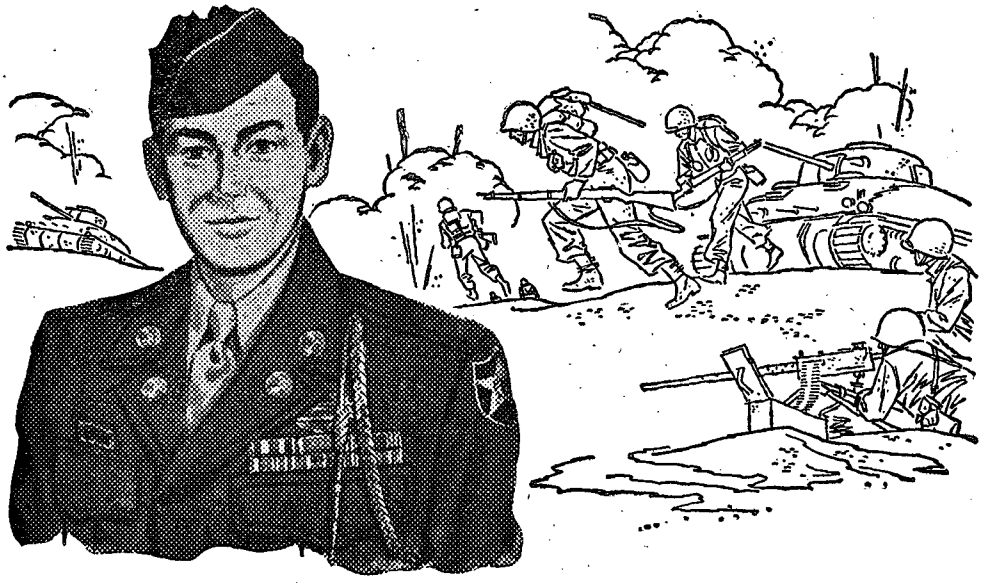

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THE HOUSE OF RISING

The Venusian beast was a nightmare of unreality

THE HUNTER FROM SPACE ARRIVES TO TEACH JIMMY HOW

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WINDS

BY FRANK BELKNAP LONG

TO COMBAT A DEADLY GAME!

JIMMY MARLOWE sat on a stump in the wild wood, sobbing and digging his knuckles into his eyes.

The thing that had happened to him was horrible.

He was old enough to realize what murder meant and how close he had come to being the victim of a murderer.

When Jimmy shut his eyes tight he was back in the cellar again. He could smell the dampness and the earth mold, and the vinegar-tartness of the cider vats. He could see the old carpets stacked against the coal bin, tightly rolled and swarming with silverfish. And he could see the dim shadowy trunk, looming out of the darkness overhead, and just the cuffs of his uncle's trousers.

Then came a hoarse grunt and the trunk descending, careening down the cellar stairs straight toward him.

Jimmy had moved in time! Just in time he had leapt back, screaming, and the trunk had struck the stone floor with a terrible, splintering crash.

But how could he go back to the house now? His Uncle Jack was a determined man. He was not a convicted criminal but a man free to plot and scheme.

He would try again. He would keep on trying until Jimmy died, and owls hooted in the empty silence around the big dark house. His Uncle Jack and his Aunt Katie, whispering, conspiring together—waiting to seize the first suitable opportunity to get rid of Jimmy and have a satisfactory explanation for the poilce.

He could see their parchment faces, their darkly brooding eyes, fastened upon him in sly reproach. "Why did you run away, Jimmy? Why, Jimmy lad? We only wanted to kill you!"

Jimmy shuddered and opened his eyes wide. Sunlight slanted down through the aisles of the forest, bathing the woodland vista in a golden haze. A tiny humming bird,

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iridescent as a dragonfly, was hovering above a wide-petaled flower so close to Jimmy he could have reached out and grasped it.

Ants were busy at the base of the stump, and a katydid was trilling from a bough overhead.

Katy did . . . Katy did . . . Katy did. . . .

Jimmy knew that Katy did—want to kill him. But Jimmy didn't want to die.

His Aunt Catherine had tried slyly by leaving the gas jet on all night in his bedroom. He'd stayed awake and turned it off, his right eye unlidded like the wary orb of an infant cyclops. But the next time—

Jimmy was smarter than Katy. Jimmy was smart enough to realize what an inheritance meant. Although Jimmy was an orphan he knew more about mean, withered people than most little boys of eight.

He was a bright alert little boy, by no means a prodigy, but guileless and loving, therefore quick to sense malice in adults. Even greed. The old dark house would belong to Jimmy when he came of age . . . if he ever did. The house and a very large sum of money. Money meant nothing to Jimmy and he hated the house as much as Uncle Jack loved it.

But how could he give up his inheritance? He couldn't just say, "I'll give it up!" and forget about it.

Uncle Jack was no dope. Uncle Jack trusted no one—and grownups were funny about giving away money. What if Jimmy grew up and changed his mind?

"Here is your supper, Jimmy!" Uncle Jack would say. And in the soup—or the eggs, boiled hard the way Jimmy liked them—would be arsenic.

Aunt Katie read detective stories. She read them aloud to Uncle Jack—and Jimmy had crept to the door and listened. Arsenic—Jimmy knew what *that* was and what it could do. It was a kind of medicine. But when you swallowed it you didn't get well. You died.

Jimmy turned pale when he thought about it.

He'd have to run away. He'd have to but—who would take him in and hide him? If he was caught and brought back he wouldn't live long enough to get another chance.

"Jimmy, you've had your chance. Now it's our turn!"

Jimmy was starting to get down from the stump when a voice said, "I wouldn't advise you to run away, Jimmy! Two can play at *that* game!"

STARTLED, Jimmy looked up. The figure standing before him was that of a very tall, pale young man, his body fitted into the strangest suit that Jimmy had even seen. It wasn't really a suit at all, but it looked a little like one of Uncle Jack's oilskin slickers, long and wet and glistening.

Pale green the slicker was and it covered the young man up completely from his ankles to his chin.

"Don't be alarmed, Jimmy!" the young man said. "I know all about you. I know just how frightened and miserable you are."

He smiled. "You need a friend, Jimmy—and you've got one!"

Jimmy gasped, and blinked furiously. The young man had a very wide forehead, and his skin was so pale that Jimmy could almost see the bones of his cheeks shining through. His hair wasn't brown or black but gooseberry green and when the sun shone on it it flashed with all the colors of the rainbow, like a dew-drenched spider web.

His eyes were strange too. They blinked unceasingly and kept changing—just like the eyes of a cat.

The young man should have frightened Jimmy. But Jimmy wasn't in the least bit scared. He wanted merely to swallow hard, on a mixture of amazement and relief and a sudden, overwhelming joy at having found a friend.

"He'd never dare to hurt you, Jimmy, if he knew *I* was here!" the young man said. "He's a cruel man and a cowardly man. Your aunt is more of an old vulture, though, and she dominates him. A nastier pair of humans harpies I've never had the good fortune to meet!"

"W-who are you?" Jimmy gulped.

"That can wait, Jimmy!" the youth said. "My world is not ugly and holds little that is evil. But we know what suffering is. Tell me something, Jimmy. Do you like zoos? Strange animals and plants with odd habits—winged and fanged like the beasts that trespass on your dreams when you've eaten something that disagrees with you?

"You know what I mean, Jimmy. It's like the fear of old houses and not being able to run fast enough. It's so dreadful that when you wake you're still frightened.

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It's so good to wake up—safe and alive! But if the beasts were in cages, Jimmy, and you could look in at them and feel perfectly safe—wouldn't you like that?"

Jimmy must have nodded, for he suddenly realized that the young man had turned and was moving swiftly away through the forest. He seemed to know that Jimmy would follow him—and Jimmy did!

They had to pass through heavy underbrush and Jimmy soon found himself lagging behind, and struggling with leaf-hidden snares that plucked and tore at his flesh. Not only clinging vines—chestnut burrs and big purple thistles.

At first the young man seemed unaware that Jimmy was having trouble. But the instant he heard Jimmy cry out he stopped short and laughed. His laughter rang out merrily in the wild wood.

"Jimmy, I forgot! *You* can't pass through foliage! If you'll have a little patience I'll burn a path for you!"

Jimmy saw the youth's hand go under his slicker and come out with something slender and shining that looked quite a bit like one of the test tubes in Jimmy's chemistry set.

Jimmy shuddered despite himself. His uncle had given him the set on his eighth birthday, without warning him that some of the chemicals were not meant to be played with. Luckily Jimmy had survived the explosion with nothing more serious than a scorched hand.

"You poor child!" Aunt Katie had whispered, pouring oil on his hand, and wrapping it in sterile gauze. "Sometimes I think your uncle is a bigger fool than he pretends to be!"

"The house might have gone up in flames and your aunt burned to death in a terrible manner!" the young man said, pointing the tube at the heavy tangle of underbrush directly in front of Jimmy. "No wonder the malicious old vixen was upset. She wanted your inheritance for herself alone!"

As the young man steadied the tube he looked straight at Jimmy and smiled. "Watch, Jimmy! I'm going to clear a path for you.

FROM the tube there shot a blinding shaft of light.

The underbrush shriveled as the light pierced it. Shriveled and coiled up, like a burning Chinese dragon made of silk.

"What made you think of dragons, Jimmy?" the young man asked, his strange eyes shining in the glare.

Jimmy hadn't said a word. He had simply remembered the parade—and the accident, with the dragon bursting into flames. His uncle had taken him to Chinatown to watch a parade and someone—not his uncle—had dropped a lighted cigarette on the dragon from a window high above the street.

"You were only six but that parade must have made a profound impression on you," the youth said. "Now, whenever you see something burning, you think of dragons. Isn't that so?"

Jimmy was too startled to nod. He was watching the burning underbrush roll away in a cloud of smoke, his jaw hanging open.

"Quite a lot of little flames left, eh, Jimmy? Guess we'll have to step up the beam a little."

The tube seemed to twist in the young man's clasp. From it there shot a shaft of pale blue light. As Jimmy stared in slack-jawed amazement all the smoke vanished, and the flames dwindled and went out. The remaining foliage wasn't even charred.

"Now keep close to me, Jimmy!" the young man warned. "This part of the forest isn't quite stable. I had to float the cages in and it took a lot of doing. Ever try floating a raft on a marsh that's covered with less than six inches of water?"

"No, I never did! Jimmy choked.

"Well—you have to change the trees a bit and make sure the angles don't melt and run together. It's difficult when you're just starting to get the *feel* of a forest like this. If it blurs when you're using the tube, you've got a problem on your hands!"

He laughed. "You don't know what I'm talking about—do you, Jimmy?"

"It sounds crazy," Jimmy blurted. "You're not crazy, are you?"

"No, Jimmy. But to be honest with you—I've often been drawn to people who are. They're close to us, and very like us. They're out of touch with ugliness, and look out through bright windows at a world that was never meant to be. Things start off wrong sometimes and stay that way. It's nobody's fault, but if you get to brooding about it—well!"

Jimmy looked frightened. "I'm not—"

"No, Jimmy. The sanity of childhood can't be shaken. You don't need to look out through bright windows. You *are* a bright window."

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Jimmy's fright diminished a little. He didn't quite see how he could be a window but it wasn't a terrifying thought—even if it changed things he had always taken for granted.

He was sure that grownups who were crazy didn't talk like—

"What did you say your name was?" Jimmy gulped.

"I didn't say. But you may call me Lacula."

"That's a funny name for a man!"

"I'm not exactly human, Jimmy. But you wouldn't understand that either. I came from very far off in a roundabout way. The universe doesn't just stretch away forever, Jimmy. It's like a house with an attic cellar, where you can meet yourself coming back. You can open a door and find you've just closed it or climb the stairs and be outside in a garden full of bright flowers that somebody planted in another time, another world.

"But you have to *know* how to move around in the great house of the universe. You have to be very old or—very wise. It takes a lot of doing, Jimmy. It's as though you were looking down through a peephole in a tree stump—looking straight down at the sky. You'd see all of the stars—but upside down and far away. And that's as far as I can take you, Jimmy.

"You'd have to fall through that peephole to see me as I really am. Now I've taken on a—well, call it protective coloration. You know how a chameleon changes, Jimmy. There are forces here that have shaped you, made you what you are. When I floated the cages in, the same forces changed me.

"I look almost human to you but I'm not at all. Not really. It's just skin deep, Jimmy. I'm just stopping over here. You know how trout fisherman stop at trailer camps, just for a day or two, to cast their flies on deep poles and hope for a sizable catch. They wear old jackets, and battered hats and you'd never think they were solemn as owls and gray and tidy in their big homes when winter closes in, freezing the foaming waters and their summer youth.

"According to our lights—we all like to hunt and fish, Jimmy. You never know what you're going to catch. The universe is so big there's always something newly strange in the whirlpools beneath gray rocks in little green worlds where the great grappling hooks have never gone, where the huntsman must tread softly and fishermen ply his rod with care."

LACULA nodded. "Even now, Jimmy, I'm standing on a higher bank than you are. But you wouldn't understand about the cones and the prisms—how they rushed together when I floated the cages in and brought me to your side of the stream."

Lacula was right. Jimmy didn't understand. In fact, when he opened his mouth to ask another question he found there were no words for what he wanted to know.

But Jimmy's mouth stayed open. They had emerged into a clearing walled with sycamores and white-barked birch trees and Jimmy was looking at something so strange that the foliage at his back seemed suddenly darkened and terrifying and full of whispering shadows.

In the center of the clearing stood a great, iron-barred cage, hemmed in by long grass and little mounds of fresh earth and the tracks of forest animals. When Jimmy stared intently he could see right through the cage—could see the long grass and the forest becoming wild again on the other side.

But that didn't change what he saw when he looked into the cage without straining to see beyond it. When he looked directly into the cage he saw only a tumbled waste of sand which stretched away to ice-capped mountain peaks shimmering in a purple haze.

Only the width of the cage separated Jimmy from the long grass in back of the mountains, but in order to pluck a blade of that grass he would have had to cross the desert on foot, trudging on wearily for hours.

Jimmy had no desire to pass between the bars and set foot in that trackless waste of sand.

The beast was impossible, a nightmare. Yet Jimmy knew that it was real. It was foraging just inside the bars, an enormous, loose-jointed thing with soot-black eyes, and a long-tapering snout which it kept half-buried in the sand.

The beast had the snout of an anteater but it was covered with down like a new-hatched chicken. It was fanning itself with a tail of blood-red plumes that grew straight out of its hindparts, and was almost as big as the spread tail of a peacock.

It was a tail such as Jimmy had never thought to see on a beast, and it was matched in strangeness only by the long, diamond-

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bright claws which slowly unsheathed themselves as Jimmy stared. The beast raised one claw as Jimmy stared, and scratched itself, its dark eyes fastened on him as though it would have much preferred to be scratching his eyes out, and sinking its teeth in his throat while it wrapped its snout about him in swiftly tightening loops. Biting and tearing and ripping at his flesh, raking his back as he struggled, and bearing him to the earth!

Not yet! Jimmy's breath was a wheeze in his throat, he was cowering back in horror but he was still unharmed. He was still a safe distance from the cage, and he had no intention of moving closer, and giving the beast a chance to turn ugly.

"Nothing to be afraid of, Jimmy!" Lacula whispered. "It's a dangerous brute, but it can't get at you. Remember, Jimmy, when you were six, and your uncle took you to the snake house at the zoo? He told you how deadly a cobra was, hoping to frighten you But the big, rearing snake, swaying back and forth an inch from the glass fascinated you, gave you a thrill. Just knowing it couldn't get at you was fun!"

Jimmy was trying hard not to look at the cage. But it would have been an accident of an unusual kind if he had failed to notice the big, square sign at the bottom of the cage. The sign was bright, like isinglass, and it glistened in the sunlight.

The writing was funny—like on the boxes of cigarettes his uncle smoked. Imported Turkish tobacco—and then a lot of half-moons and broken-off zigzags.

Lacula laughed at Jimmy's perplexity. "Like Arabic, eh, Jimmy? It isn't really—but it's not English either. Suppose we turn it into English."

Lacula raised the tube as he spoke and let the light shine out over the sign. The writing changed into letters.

"All right, Jimmy! I'm sure you can read it now."

Jimmy read the sign.

INHABITANT OF MARS

This is a peculiarly vicious specimen, and must not be tellesated by the immature. Not all Martians are vicious, but the harmless varieties are much less interesting from a melfleshish point of view. Specimen captured and caged by Lacula in his third expedition to the Solar System.

Jimmy couldn't even spell out the hard words but he knew what a specimen was. When you chased butterflies and caught one— When Jimmy became very thoughtful and quiet he was a little ahead of his years. He had read a book about butterfly collecting and a book called "Astronomy for Young People."

Mars was a planet in the sky, not a star —and there were seven other planets. Venus was the brightest one.

"Yes, Jimmy, Venus is as bright as a star when you look at it on a clear night," Lacula said. "But what you really see is the sunlight reflected back. Suppose we take a look at a Venusian!"

Jimmy wanted to scream when he saw it.

THE cage stood at the edge of the clearing in bright sunlight but there were deep, dark shadows behind it and it was filled with swirling mist. When Jimmy stared past the bars he could see five other cages filled with moving shadows . . . each rocking a little as if buffeted by the wind that was blowing, keenly chill, up Jimmy's spine.

He tried hard to look at the other cages, but his eyes kept coming back to the hideous beast in front of him. The beast wasn't moving at all, just watching him.

The beast had gill-slits down both sides of its neck and webbed claws and feet, and when the sunlight shone on its big-eyed face it looked as dead as something hung up to dry in the window of a fish store. All choked up was its face, all mouth and all throat—as if it had spent its entire life gasping for air. Breathing harder and harder and never getting enough.

"Keep your distance, Jimmy!" Lacula warned. "It's a malicious little beast. You see—Venus is a dismal, foggy, horrible world. The air's stagnant and thin and that creature has lived in a bog from the day it was hatched."

Jimmy took an alarmed step backward. Only Lacula's calmness and smiling eyes prevented him from succumbing to utter panic.

"It has no natural enemies," Lacula went on. "But it knows how to hate. It would kill you just to get at your inheritance of fresh, clean air!"

Lacula seemed suddenly to realize that Jimmy was trembling inwardly in horrible fright. He whirled abruptly and gripped Jimmy's shoulder.

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"Now, now, Jimmy—don't become frightened! I didn't mean to frighten you. I guess you've seen enough. It's time you were getting back to the big house."

Jimmy froze motionless. It was hard to believe that Lacula expected him to go back. He couldn't, wouldn't—not if he had to wrench free and take to his heels.

"Don't worry, Jimmy!" Lacula spoke softly. "I wouldn't send you back if the danger were very great. You've got to trust me, Jimmy—and believe in me!"

When Jimmy looked straight at Lacula a lot of strange thoughts seemed to rush together in his mind.

Lacula was like many things at once—things that Jimmy had seen and imagined and dreamed about. A big, twisted tree trunk, all knotted and gray with moss, and the lightning forking down, and a little leafhopper, jumping about in the forest.

And the gold and russet splendor of the autumn woods and someone playing a piano through shining windows in the dawn, and Jimmy himself lying in the dew-drenched grass, yawning lazily and stretching his arms while the morning mist rose about him.

Lacula was much more than that. Lacula was the sea, wide and boundless, with the great sun shining down and Jimmy himself running along the sand, stopping to examine the bright shells and pink corals of the sea.

Lacula was a treasure chest, green with seaweed, and a pearly nautilus and the far-off beating of jungle drums. Lacula was a mountain, rising pale and purple at the edge of all the jungles Jimmy had ever dreamed of exploring, and Lacula was an attic filled with cobwebs and old trunks, the dust so thick on the windows that Jimmy couldn't see out.

Lacula was a maze of complicated machinery, all whirring and blurring, and Jimmy himself in a greasy mechanic's uniform, his face smeared with grease. Jimmy himself working on Lacula, solving him, taking him apart. Jimmy savoring the joy of tinkering, of understanding the bright wonder of smoothly-moving parts, the wonder of pistons, wheels, grease cups, lovely rods and wires, all gleaming, a nest of revolving beauty filled with rainbow colors.

BUT NOW Lacula was speaking to him and pressing something bright and shining into his hand.

"In your world, Jimmy, everything's all mixed up. You have myths and you have science—but you don't realize that what you call a myth is just something true that you've found out for yourself without sitting down and racking your brains over it.

"If you have any kind of a mind—you'll notice things. Even that ugly Martian beast knows more than some of your scientists. It has its own myths and believes in them!"

Jimmy could feel Lacula's strong hand pressing his fingers together tightly over the shining object.

"Hold on to it, Jimmy! I'm going to tell you how to use it. Long ago in your world a race of wise men had a name for it. The pipes of Pan! It's really a science but they guessed—they *knew*! Now listen carefully Jimmy—"

The sun was low in the sky when Jimmy got back to the big dark house.

He opened the front door with a terrible fear in his heart, half-expecting to see his uncle standing in the lower hallway with a knotted cord swinging from his wrist. A horrible, vengeful figure like a hangman—prepared to make a sudden murderous attack on Jimmy for daring to run away.

Jimmy had forgotten that his uncle was a quiet, even-tempered man who knew how to bide his time. So overwrought, in fact, was Jimmy's imagination that he had built his uncle into a bogey that did the man an injustice.

Uncle Jack was the soul of discretion. Always there had been deviousness in his attempts to murder his nephew . . . a slow, careful approach to his deeds of dark violence which stamped him as an artist in crime.

There was deviousness in the house now. A sinister and dreadful deviousness, a whispering behind a door on the second floor which was only slightly ajar.

Back and forth in a room upstairs paced Jimmy's uncle—and as still and taut as a spindle from an old-fashioned spinning wheel towered Aunt Kathie, her sallow face wreathed in a crafty smile.

A tall, bony woman and a wrinkled-faced sprite of a man, looking almost kindly in his pacing, his bushy black brows knitted in thoughtful concern.

"But what if it *doesn't* work, Katie! I'm no electrician."

"Don't be a fool! It's bound to work, and it will look like an accident. When Jimmy's

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in the bathtub I'll simply reach in and push my electric coiling irons off the shelf! I tell you the current will pass right through him. He'll be electrocuted so fast he'll never know what struck him!"

"I don't like it! It's risky and—it's *beastly!*"

Jimmy's aunt smiled coldly. "Not half as beastly as trying to smash Jimmy's head with a trunk. It'll be quick and merciful!"

"But the idea's not new!" Jimmy's uncle protested. "The police read whodunits too, Katie—don't you forget it! That trick's been used in fiction so often."

"Only four or five times, you white-livered Crippen! And not with coiling irons—electric fans, electric heaters. Can't you see the beauty of it? Coiling irons attached to the house circuit and left on would carry just as much voltage. Enough to kill a child certainly.

"And coiling irons are so light and could fall into a bathtub so easily. Jimmy stood up in the bath, with soap in his eyes, fumbling around for a towel. Jimmy accidentally knocked my coiling irons into the water. I'm getting on in years and I'm as absent-minded as the proverbial professor. I simply forgot to turn the coiling irons off.

Jimmy's aunt gave her mouse-colored hair a pat. "How do you like my hairdo? I won't ask the police to admire it—just let them notice it. If we're careful not to overact they'll have to believe us!"

"Are you understudying Constance Kent or Lizzie Borden?" Jimmy's uncle sneered.

"That's not a very flattering thing to say. You have an ugly imagination and I'll thank you to keep your thoughts to yourself. I could mention a few things that a certain Jack did."

Jimmy's aunt gave Jimmy's uncle a conciliatory poke in the ribs.

But Uncle Jack was not appeased. "I still don't like it!" he muttered.

THEY continued to argue for a while, and as they bandied words their voices rose heatedly. Louder and louder they talked, all unaware that Jimmy had crept up the central staircase and was crouching just outside the door, his eyes wide with horror.

"I've drawn your bath for you, Jimmy!" Aunt Catherine said, a half hour later.

Jimmy had allowed his uncle to find him in the lower hallway—not in the upper. He'd returned downstairs and made a small noise to attract attention, and his uncle had come padding down in his carpet slippers, his dark, close-set eyes bright with solicitude.

Jimmy's return into the bosom of his family had been tacitly accepted with: "Next time you go bird nesting, Jimmy, you'd better tell us. When you just run off like that we think of everything. That quicksand bog on Miles' place could take a youngster down mightly fast.

"One of these days I'm going to give Miles a piece of my mind. The least he could do is put up a sign!"

Drippy words, brimming with duplicity—not a word about the trunk crashing down.

Jimmy wondered why, if his uncle felt that way, he'd failed to put signs all over the big, dark house. "Be careful! Watch your step, Jimmy! We only want to kill you!"

Now Jimmy stood facing his aunt in his own small bedroom—pajama-clad and looking a little scared, but trying to pretend that he wasn't at all.

"Aw, gee—do I have to take a bath tonight, Aunt Katie?"

"Jimmy, I'm ashamed of you! It's been more than a week! How can you want to go around filthy?"

It was on the tip of Jimmy's tongue to plead a sore throat. He wondered why his aunt hadn't thought of forcing him to take a cold bath, and opening all the windows while he slept. He'd heard that there were drugs now which could cure pneumonia quickly. Maybe that was why.

Jimmy suddenly realized that he was letting Lacula down. He had no right to try and squirm out of it when he'd promised to be brave.

"Aw—all right, Aunt Katie!"

Up to the age of six Jimmy had never enjoyed the privilege of taking a bath in privacy. He'd had to make the best of Aunt Katie's bending over the tub and scrubbing his back with a long-handled brush. Bearing down on the bristles, smiling maliciously, ignoring Jimmy's protests and scrubbing him harder and harder, like an evil old witch. Sometimes Jimmy's back had stayed sore for a week.

But Jimmy was a big boy now and Aunt Katie was the soul of modesty.

When Jimmy found himself alone in the bathroom he noticed with a little shudder inching up his spine that his aunt had left the door ajar. He'd expected that, of course, but it wasn't easy to take.

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He noticed other things. The coiling irons at the edge of the shelf, directly over the towel rack and well within reach of a curving arm. And the little shimmer of heat which danced back and forth above the shelf. Someone had once whispered to Jimmy in a dream that if you can see heat it means that death is shoeing a horse and getting ready to ride.

Jimmy forwent the ritual of the bath.

He did not test the water with his hands or toes, or waltz around the bathroom drumming on his chest. He did not feel like Tarzan tonight.

His mouth was as dry as death and he was careful to keep his right hand dry too—dry and tightly clenched as he kicked off his slippers, shrugged off his pajamas, and climbed into the tub.

Aunt Katie had drawn Jimmy a piping hot bath. The water was so hot it warmed the sides of the tub but it didn't warm Jimmy. A biting cold wind seemed to blow through him as he settled down in a tub that might just as well have been filled with ice water.

Jimmy waited, his knees drawn up, and knocking together. Waiting was an agony. He sat there scarcely daring to breathe, feeling worse than helpless, feeling forever beyond help as the seconds lengthened into minutes and more minutes and waiting became intolerable.

FOR AN INSTANT, as the wind rose and fell and swirled about Jimmy under the water, he thought he saw a shadow flit across the door. But it was quickly gone, and he saw nothing more for a full minute.

His heart was beating wildly when the shadow returned— Blowing, blowing toward him through the water came even colder ripples. Of dread, of terror—swirling around his spine as he stared.

The hand was gaunt, clawlike—but familiar. As it crept around the door Jimmy shuddered convulsively and flung a glance straight across the bathroom to the medicine chest mirror on the opposite wall.

In the misted glass he could see his aunt's face. She was peering around the door straight at him, not dreaming that he could see her, her teeth bared like the fangs of a she-wolf.

The bony hand was reaching out now to grasp the electric coiling irons. Not to coil human hair but to coil Jimmy! To coil Jimmy into a knot of anguish in the water, with the great pulsing awful shock of a tubful of electricity.

Jimmy came wholly to life then. Lacula had shown him just how to grasp it and what stops to press. It was like a little flute—a child's toy flute that could be played upon by a wise child instructed by a wisdom that was older than the human race.

"If they come at you and try to kill you again, Jimmy—blow as hard as you can and *don't stop!*"

So—Jimmy blew!

He raised the flute to his lips and blew upon it just as utter triumph flared in his aunt's hate-convulsed face.

A piercing shriek came from beyond the door.

It was hardly human, that shriek. It was like the shriek of an animal with its leg caught in a trap, and tugging with all its might to free itself from the trap. As it pierced the door with its torment the bony hand whipped back.

Away from the coiling irons and straight back against the white, stricken face in the medicine cabinet mirror. There was a sudden, terrible gust of wind, blowing outward from Jimmy as Jimmy's aunt slapped herself in the face with her own hard knuckles.

Then the door was ripped from its hinges and fell back upon her with a deafening crash.

Jimmy blew harder.

The water in the tub began to quiver and bubble up about Jimmy but he kept right on blowing.

The wind rose and became a cyclone in the dark hall where the door was now spinning back and forth like a gale-lashed leaf in a forest of giants.

Aunt Katie was trying to pick herself up from under the door.

Jimmy could see her scrawny neck and sharply arching back, and a strange thought flashed into his mind. She's just like a big, snarling cat, and if she had fur it would rise along her back.

Then Jimmy saw his Uncle Jack. His uncle was rushing down the hallway toward the bathroom, his coat blowing up about his head. He was fighting the wind, which was tearing and ripping at him, and his face was a twitching mask of horror.

There was something owl-like about Uncle Jack as he struggled with the wind. His hair stood out on both sides of his head in blowing tufts, and his cheeks kept sinking in and

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puffing out as though with an evil hooting that he was powerless to control.

Suddenly as Jimmy stared, still blowing fiercely, a floorboard ripped loose directly beneath Aunt Katie. Before she could get to her feet she was rising on the board and clinging to it. She was screaming and another floorboard was ripping loose under Uncle Jack.

Jimmy blew on the pipe.

Down the long hallway the two floorboards floated, like rafts caught in a churning pool of darkness that kept spinning faster and faster. As the floorboards dwindled to spinning motes Jimmy blew with all his might.

A brightness had begun to fill the bathroom. It swirled down from the ceiling and around the tube and the small piping figure in the tub.

With it came a slight tremor, as though the ground beneath the house had at last felt the tug of the piping. The tremor increased in violence until it shook the walls of the house.

But the house didn't collapse. Though Jimmy continued to blow on the pipe the tremor subsided as quickly as it had arisen, as though the strange shrill music had lost its power to move and shake.

But just before the house became quiet again a shrill, stricken cry drifted down to Jimmy as if from something that had been caught and caged in flight high above the house.

IN ANOTHER INSTANT the entire ceiling seemed to roll back, and Jimmy found himself staring straight up at the stars with the pipe still pressed to his lips.

Jimmy stopped blowing the small flutelike pipe then.

Lacula was leaving the Earth. He was floating the cages out by balancing himself on a beam of light and training the tube in his hand on a long procession of cages floating in the night sky.

He was facing Jimmy in the middle of the sky, but quite low down, and suddenly his hand went up in a greeting that made Jimmy's heart leap.

"Good hunting, Jimmy! I've had good hunting—thanks to you!"

Jimmy stood up in the tub and waved back.

He was still waving when Lacula flashed the light full on one of the cages, a cage so near to Jimmy that he could see the light—the light gleaming on the trees of a familiar forest and every stricken lineament of the two faces which stared out at him from between the bars.

The faces were so white, drawn and ravaged by despair that Jimmy couldn't bear to look at them.

He could hardly bear to read the sign at the bottom of the cage.

INHABITANTS OF EARTH

These specimens are peculiarly vicious and must not be tellesated by the immature. . . .

Jimmy didn't want Lacula to know how he felt, for he was a little ashamed to feel pity for a malice as cold and merciless as the black night of space.

He was ashamed because his eyes smarted a little, and the smallest of lumps had come into his throat.

So—Jimmy shut his eyes tight.

When he opened them again he was looking up at the ceiling of the bathroom.

Jimmy looked down at his hand, and saw that it was empty.

Jimmy got out of the tub, shivering a little, and into his pajamas—and went out into the hall.

There were gaping holes where the floorboards had been ripped loose and the bathroom door lay in splinters at his feet.

He ran along the hall, shouting, "Uncle Jack! Aunt Katie!"

He should have known better, of course. He had seen the faces, staring out.

But he kept on calling. "Uncle Jack! Aunt Katie! Uncle Jack!"

Silence—not a sound anywhere . . . except Jimmy's own voice calling out and his footsteps echoing through the big empty house.

Silence—as complete as though some terrible unknown god of the outer darkness had sucked all sound back into itself.

Silence—not a sound anywhere . . . except sweeping over Jimmy—the wisdom that comes from facing reality and taking it firmly by the horns. Jimmy was alone in his own house now—and someday he would marry and have children of his own.

In a big, quiet, friendly old house.

It was his house to make friendly now.

His house—Jimmy's.

Somewhere in the bright, unfathomable otherwise . . . Lacula smiled.

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A Complete Novelet

An incautious movement might mean instant and horrible death

NO ESCAPE FROM

CHAPTER I

New Projector

THE room was like a tomb. There were only the gray walls, the gray floor and ceiling.

There was only the rasp of my irate breathing as I stood with my back against the locked door, waiting for something unguessable to happen.

The melodramatic mystery with which Malvin Parker surrounds his demonstration of each new invention has irritated me ever since the fall midnight in 1952. This was when he locked the door of the cubbyhole we shared at Tech U., produced what seemed to be an ordinary dinner plate somewhat dirtier than the hundreds we washed every day in the Commons' steamy kitchen and with no other tool but his fingernails, stripped a thin film from it to display it

It took a crackpot genius like Parker to appear in a room

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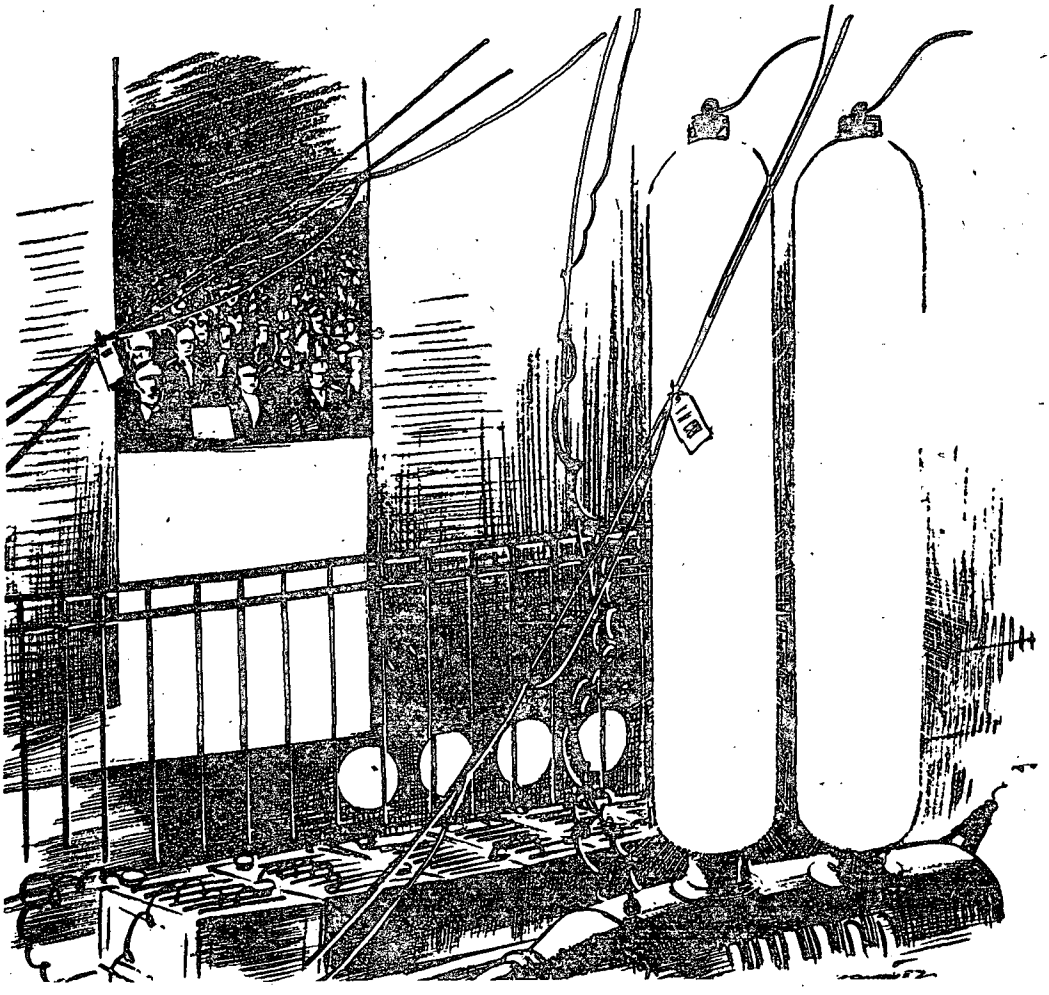

DESTINY

By ARTHUR LEO ZAGAT

clean and sparkling as if it had just come from the tubs.

That was the first piece ever made of the laminated tableware that has emancipated the world's housewives from the post-prandial sink. On that plate, and a hundred-odd other products of Parker's fecund brain, were founded the vast Loring Enterprises and my own not inconsiderable fortune. The best piece of business I've ever done was to sign him up, that very night, to the contract by which I engaged to support him and his dependents for life in exchange for a blanket assignment of all his past and future patents.

Best for Dr. Malvin Parker as well as for me. Were it not for Billingsley Loring's genius at industrial promotion, Parker would be just another crackpot inventor wearing out chairs in one office anteroom after another.

Yes, for well over a quarter-century I've

that he could not enter — and then prove he was not there!

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found it profitable to humor his whims and so when he challenged me to make it impossible for anyone to enter this room in his laboratory-dwelling, I proceeded to do so without asking the questions I knew he'd refuse to answer.

There were no windows, of course, and the ventilating outlets were screened with fine wire mesh welded in place. I had my men strip the chamber to its structural plasticrete and spray all its surfaces with transparent Loring Instant-Dry Quikenam. The single door was fitted with another of Parker's devices, a phonolock which I myself set to a keyword I confided to no one. It opened inward, moreover, so that with my back planted against it, no one could enter without pushing me aside.

In the harsh glare of the coldlight strip edging the ceiling, the uniform grayness robbed the room of shape and dimension. It was an illimitable, terrifying vastness. It closed in on me so tightly I could not move, could scarcely breathe. If only there were some detail, even only a shadow for my eyes to seize upon. If only there were some sound—

There was sound, a sourceless drone barely audible. There was a shadow; the shadow of a shadow so tenuous I could not make out if it was right on top of me, on the opposite wall or in between.

MALVIN PARKER stood in the center of the room!

He couldn't possibly have gotten in here. He was here, undeniably, his great grizzled head hunched forward on the habitually bowed shoulders of his bearlike hulk, a triumphant smile flickering in the deep-sunk dark pools of his eyes. He— The answer came to me. "Oh, no, Mal Parker. You can't fool with a tridimensional video image of yourself."

"I suppose not," his projected voice sighed but on his pictured face that smile of his deepened. "I wouldn't try." The apparition stepped forward, grabbed my forearm with gnarled and very tangible fingers. "Does that feel like a video image?"

"Urggh!" I jerked loose, butted him with my shoulder, so hard that despite his greater height and weight he staggered sideward. My throat clamped as I goggled at a brown flurry of lab coat, at a leg and foot—

The rest of Malvin Parker had vanished!

He at once reappeared, looking a little scared. "You shouldn't have done that, Billiken." That nickname, underlying my shortness and rotundity, was like a slap in my face and he knew it. "You might have electrocuted me."

"Electrocuted! With what? There's nothing but empty space here."

"Right, Billiken. But there are plenty of bare high voltage leads where I am."

"Where are you?" I gagged. He had appeared in a room it was utterly impossible to enter, he'd proved to me that he was indubitably here, now he told me he was somewhere else. "Where the devil are you?"

"In my electronics laboratory, a floor above you. What you're gaping at is—well, you might call it a material image."

"I might," I flung back, hoarsely. "But I don't know why. It sounds like gobbledegook to me."

He chuckled again, enjoying my discomfiture. "Look, Billiken. You're familiar with the principles of tele—" He broke off, looked to the right at something I could not see, or at someone! For he was saying, "Just a moment, dear. I'm talking with Bill Loring," and I knew who it was. Only two persons could have brought that tender affection to his seamed countenance. One of them, his wife Neva, died eight years ago.

"I don't see why not," he responded to a voice I could not hear, and turned back to me. "That irreverent daughter of mine suggests that we continue our discussion over drinks in her sitting room. What do you say?"

I said it was a good idea, and meant it wholesouledly. I wanted desperately to get out of this blasted room where I talked with a man who insisted he wasn't there.

"Very well." He nodded. "We'll meet you there."

He disappeared again. For good.

The room was just as it had been when I locked myself into it, the ventilator screens unbroken, the paint film unmarred. Unless I'd been hypnotized by the droning sound which had now cut off, the door that swung open as I spoke the keyword was opening for the first time since I'd closed myself in here alone.

But my biceps still ached from the grip of Malvin Parker's fingers, digging in.

Better than he could suspect, I knew the way to the jewelcase-like boudoir Neva designed to set off her fragile, almost ethereal beauty. My breath caught in a sudden poign-

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ant twinge of recollection as Sherry Parker smiled at me from the chair where she presided over a gleaming Autobar. She was her mother at twenty all over again; the same cameo features, the same glowing, amber hair, the same golden skin.

"Uncle Billiken!" she exclaimed. "You're an old meanie staying away from me for months."

"Now, now, my dear," I chuckled indulgently. "You haven't missed me an iota. Not," I cocked an eyebrow at the two youths who hovered over her, "with so much pleasanter companions than an old codger like me."

"Oh these!" She pouted prettily. "These are just Dad's assistants. Robin Adlair." The burly, fair-haired chap to whom she gestured grinned down at me. "And Bart Murtry."

"This is an honor, Mr. Loring." Murtry was only slightly taller than myself, narrow-faced, his hair black as Sheol, his black eyes sultry. "You've been my inspiration ever since I read Lorne Randall's 'Colossus of Commerce' as a kid. That's a great book, sir, about a great man."

"Yes, the book's a good job." It ought to be. I'd paid Randall plenty to write it. "Nice to have you with the organization, Mr. Murtry." I turned back to Sherry. "May I have a Martini, my dear? No bitters."

SHERRY smiled and nodded at me. "And no olive. I haven't forgotten, Uncle Billiken." Somehow I didn't mind her calling me that, perhaps because it reminded me how Neva and I used to laugh, in this very room, over what her baby tongue made of Billingsley. "By the way, Dad asked me to tell you that he'll be right in. He stopped to make some notes."

Her slim fingers twirled dials atop the sculptured silver chest that sat on a low table before her and it started to whirr softly.

"You know, Mr. Loring," Murtry said. "That Autobar epitomizes for me the difference between you and Dr. Parker. He invented the mechanism that concocts any beverage you set the dials to and delivers it in precisely the right glass at precisely the right temperature, but what did he have when he was through? An ugly and expensive contrivance whose sale would have been limited to a few hotels and restaurants.

"It took you to have casings designed for it that blend with any decor and engineering techniques that brought its cost within the budget of the average family. And then you had your advertising and public relations staff put on a campaign that made it something without which no home could be considered well-appointed. You transformed the demand for it from a few thousands to millions."

"That's right, my boy. That's the story."

"But not all of it, Bart," the blond Adlair drawled, his high-cheekboned, blunt-jawed face naive to my quick glance. "Billingsely Loring didn't take any risk in exploiting the demand he created. What he did, as he always does with new and untried products, was to turn over the Autobar patent to a corporation set up for the purpose and which, while he still held control, contracted with Loring Enterprises to manufacture the contraption on a cost-plus basis and to sell it as sole agent. If it had been a failure the loss would have been the Autobar Company's stockholders'. Since it succeeded, the major portion of the profits go to Loring Enterprises. To Billingsley Loring."

"What's wrong with that?" Murtry demanded.

"Did I say anything was wrong with it?" Adlair spread big hands almost as acid-stained as Parker's, blue eyes innocent. "I merely mentioned it because Lorne Randall left it out of the chapter in his book from which you cribbed what you've just said."

"Cribbed!" White spots pitted the wing-tips of the other youth's nostrils. "Why you rat!"

"Bart!" Sherry exclaimed, a warning note in her voice. And then, "It's time for the Comedy Players, Bart. Turn them on for me, like a good boy. Please."

CHAPTER II

Industrial Giant

NOW there, I thought, as he went across the room, is a young man who might be more useful to me than puttering his time away in a laboratory. He thumbed a switch. On the wall an oblong brightened, took on depth and perspective. The scene was a moonlit garden filled with soft music from an unseen orchestra.

Quarter lifesize but otherwise convincing-

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ly real-seeming, a girl in a diaphanous evening dress strolled into it, a tuxedoed youth close behind. I didn't hear what they were saying because Malvin Parker entered just then and came toward me.

"About time you showed up," I growled. "Do you think I've got nothing to do but stand around waiting for you?"

"Sorry." He didn't sound it. "I was delayed. Thank you." He took the filled wineglass Adlair had brought to him. "Port, eh? Just what I need." The blond chap handed me my cocktail. "Robin," Parker said, "is my good right hand, Billiken."

"So I rather imagined." Seeing the two together, I realized how much alike they were. Not physically, except for their height, but in another, more significant way. I didn't like this Adlair. "What about the monkey business you pulled in that room, Mal? How did you get in and out of it?"

"I told you that I wasn't in it, except in somewhat the same sense Lilli Denton and Storm Rand," he gestured to the screen, "are in this one."

"Oh, come now. Those images look and sound real enough but if I went over there and tried to touch them, I'd feel only the wall. Back there I not only heard and saw you. I felt you."

Parker's taunting smile was back in his eyes. "No, Billiken. You did not feel me. Look. The images you see on that video screen are complexes of colored light produced in the apparatus behind it. They are so modulated by impulses broadcast from a studio a thousand miles away, as to affect your retina in the same way it would be by light reflected directly from the persons and objects depicted. What you hear is sound produced in that same apparatus and similarly modulated to affect your ears in the same way as sounds produced in that studio."

"Thanks for the lecture on video," I snapped. "But what's it got to do with the subject?"

"The principle is the same."

"The devil it is. Light is energy. The electro-magnetic force actuating the loudspeaker is energy. You can modulate energy by energy transmitted from a remote source so as to give me the illusion of seeing and hearing objects located at that source. You can't give me the illusion of feeling something I don't actually touch."

Parker's grizzled eyebrows arched quizzically. "Why not?"

"Because I can't feel energy." Adlair, I noticed, had gone back to the girl. They were laughing together at some banter from the screen and Murtry, beside me, watched them with smoldering eyes. "I can feel only something material and you can't create matter, much less modulate it from a distance to seem what it is not."

"No? Remember the mole you used to have on your cheek, Billiken?"

I remembered it. I remembered how it had bothered Neva. "What about it?"

"You had it removed by what's called knifeless surgery. Nothing material touched your flesh. High-frequency waves, pure energy, sliced away a bit of your bodily tissue as efficiently as the most material of steel scalpels could have. Is there any reason energy in some such form might not affect other bits of tissue in ways similar to that in which they are affected by matter?"

I couldn't think of any. I had to admit so, grudgingly.

"Now," Parker smiled, "when you say you 'feel' an object, you really mean that certain specialized bits of your bodily tissue, the nerve endings in your skin, are affected in ways your brain learned in early infancy to mean that they are in contact with matter having certain physical properties; hardness, form, texture, temperature; which sum up to a certain mental concept—the object in question. If those same nerve endings are affected in precisely the same way by, say, some form of energy, would that not mean to your brain that they are in contact with that same object?"

"Well, probably."

"And if at the same time you seemed to see and hear that object the illusion would be complete, would it not? The illusion, for instance, that I was actually, physically present in a room I could not possibly enter."

SO THE apparition with which I'd wrestled had been as unreal, as insubstantial as the boy and girl locked in closed embrace on the video screen across the room.

"From apparatus on the other side of the wall," Parker explained, "which was permeable to the range of frequencies I used, I projected a tridimensional video image of myself plus a complex of energies that affected your sensory-nerve endings as the surfaces of my body and its clothing would have. Your own brain did the rest."

"It certainly did. I could have sworn—

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Hold it," I interrupted myself. "How could I throw an—an illusion around?" I'd recalled how I'd flung him from me, how all of him but his leg had vanished. "How could I almost electrocute an image?"

"Not you, Billiken. It was your image that came within an ace of throwing me against a live busbar in my lab above you. You see, I had a transmitter scanning you too so that I could watch your reactions." His eye-corners crinkled with puckish amusement. "You should have seen the expression on your face when I suddenly appeared to you."

"It must have been very funny." The Martini I sipped was acrid. Sherry must have put in the bitters after all. "That's a neat gadget you've trumped up, Mal." I made myself sound admiring. "One of the neatest you've ever produced." And then I let him have it. "But what good is it?"

He stared at me as if I'd spoken in some unintelligible language. "What good?"

"Precisely. What are its commercial possibilities? How can I make a profit out of it?"

"Why, I don't know," Parker stammered, his eyes satisfactorily miserable. "I— Well, it was a challenging problem and I worked it out."

"On my time and at my expense. So suppose you get busy now and work out something this cute trick of yours can do that people will pay money for. Some practical use it can be put to that isn't already being served by conventional video."

He wasn't looking at me. He was looking at his daughter and on his seamed countenance was the almost pleading expression that used to be there when he'd look at his wife as I dressed him down. Neva would laugh a little and then tell him that even if he didn't owe it to me to be practical, he did to her. Sherry's velvet-red lips parted but before she could speak, Bart Murtry forestalled her.

"May I make a suggestion, Mr. Loring?"

"Of course, my boy. The Loring organization's all one big, happy family. Nothing pleases me more than if one of my—er—children, so to speak, comes up with a good, workable idea."

Robin Adlair had decided to take an interest, was coming toward us. "What you said just now," Murtry continued, "reminded me that video is not a perfect advertising medium. It can only tell its audience about a product and show them what it looks like. With this new invention you can permit people actually to handle things—woman's hats, for instance." The black eyes were glowing. "Let the average woman try a becoming hat on and she won't be able to resist buying it. The same for dresses. And as for men—they could actually shave with the razor blade you want to sell them, write with a new kind of fountain pen, even try out the controls of a helicopter or roadcar. The possiblities are limitless."

"Very good, my boy. Excellent. I can see our prospectus now. The Loring—er—Teleseler puts your product into the nation's homes!' "

"Bunk."

I WHEELED to Adlair, from whom the interruption had come. "You insolent young whippersnapper! How dare you call anything I say bunk?"

"Because that's what it is," he drawled, grinning at me. "You can't put anyone's product into even one home till you've got a receiver there. Who's going to fill a room with apparatus just so they can try on hats or shave with razors that disappear the instant they turn off the current?"

"Fill a room, nothing," Murtry snapped, glaring at the blond fellow as if he very cheerfully could wring his neck. "It can be engineered down to convenient size."

"Maybe, Bart. Maybe it can, but you still can't engineer out the extra tubes and coils and condensers that always will run up its cost to double that of a video which will give its owner exactly as much information and entertainment. You—"

"That's it!" Mal Parker's exclamation cut Adlair short. "That's the moneymaking angle you're looking for, Billiken. Entertainment."

This was something new, Parker offering an idea for making money. "Go ahead, Mal," I encouraged him, silkily. It would be ridiculous, of course, and I'd have another chance to slap him down. "Tell us about it. What sort of entertainment video can't present as well?"

"A sort these youngsters wouldn't know anything about because tridimensional video killed it before they were old enough to be entertained by anything except a rattle. Look, Billiken. Has any show video has brought to you ever given you anywhere near the kick we used to get sitting in the balcony of the old Bijou Theater? Wasn't there something we got not from the per-

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formers but from the audience? Didn't sharing our emotions with a thousand others physically present heighten our own emotions?"

"Mass hysteria," I grunted. "Crowd psychology—crowd!" I caught up the word. "Those old shows certainly did pull in the crowds and they paid. They paid plenty, but the huge wages offered actors and actresses by the video companies made it impossible—Hold on!" The nape of my neck puckered with the chill prickles of inspiration. "This thing of yours—there's no limit to the number of material images it can recreate from one prototype, is there?"

"No, Billiken. Nor to the distance from the original."

"And to all intents and purposes they're exactly the same as living persons. The scenery too. We'd need to build only one set." My mind was working at fever heat now. "We could have a single company acting in, say New York, and it would appear simultaneously in—"

"Any number of cities, towns and villages," Parker caught fire from me, "wherever you had theaters with identical stages!"

"Precisely. So that the cost of the original production can be divided by any desired number of theaters into which your device can put it. The possibilities for profit are enormous." I pulled in breath. "You see, Mal, what a practical man can do with one of your scientific toys."

"Wonderful," Murtry exclaimed, but Adlair simply looked confused, as did Sherry. Her father, however was for once properly impressed. "I never cease being amazed at the way your mind works, Billiken. You honestly think that you—I mean I suppose that by tomorrow morning you'll have your bright young men selling stock in the—"

"Loring Multidram Corporation," I named it in one of those flashes of inspiration Lorne Randall calls the mark of my peculiar genius. "No. Not quite as quickly as all that. We've got to put on a public demonstration first, in the ten key cities where my best suck—er—where the outstanding investors in my promotions reside."

I was pacing the floor now as my mind raced, planning the operation. "Mal. Prepare blueprints and specifications for the patent lawyers and another set for the engineering department so that they can start producing the pilot sets. You'll supervise that. Murtry," I turned to the swarthy youth. "I want you to take charge of erecting the theaters and installing the apparatus as the sets come out of the workshop. I'll have the office give you a list of the cities. Sherry, my dear. How would you like to select the first play we present, hire the director and performers and so on?"

Her eyes were topazes lit from within. "I'd love it."

"The job's yours, then." She'd get a tremendous kick out of it and it didn't make much difference how good the play was or how well acted, the novelty would put it over. "I'll have my regular staff take care of the publicity." *That* I couldn't trust to amateurs. "I think that covers everything."

"How about Robin?" Sherry asked. "You haven't given him anything to do."

"No, I haven't." I looked at the fellow, standing spraddle-legged in the center of the room and thought of a way to wipe that lazy but somehow insolent grin from his face. "I'll tell you what you can do, Adlair. You can assist your friend Murtry. Under his orders, of course."

CHAPTER III

Death From a Shadow

CERTAIN disturbing business developments engrossed all my attention and I completely forgot about the Multidram project until my secretary reminded me that the demonstration was only a week off. I learned then that one change had been made in the original plan. Sherry Parker had employed a number of players under contract to rival video networks with studios located at different points in the United States, two in England and one in Paris.

Since this made it impossible to assemble the cast at any one place, it had been decided to install transmitters as well as receivers in all ten theaters. In this way some performers could speak their lines in New York, others in Los Angeles, London and so on, but the net effect still would be the same as though all were playing on a single stage.

The scenery was erected in Los Angeles, would be reproduced in material image on the other stages. The originals of the smaller properties, books, maps, and the like, would be placed at the location of the characters

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who initially handled them.

It was Bart Murtry who'd worked out this solution to the difficulty. He'd further justified my estimate of his ability by building the ten theaters in exact replica, auditoriums as well as stages, thus effecting a considerable saving in architects' fees and the cost of fabrication.

Instead of a sophisticated, modern piece written for video, Sherry had preserved the archaic flavor of the presentation by reviving a mid-twentieth century war play replete with the swashbuckling heroics, air raid alarms, gunfire and other bellicose trappings of that bygone era. All this gave me an idea. "See here, Foster," I told my secretary. "We'll reserve seats and issue tickets to the people we're inviting to the premiere."

"An excellent idea, sir." He hesitated, tugged at the sandy mustache he was cultivating with sparse success. "Er—what *are* tickets, Mr. Loring?"

I laughed, for the first time in weeks. "Tickets, Foster, are— Oh, look here." I riffled the sheets he'd laid on my desk, found the plan of the auditoriums. "Suppose we mark these rows of seats A, B, C and so on, starting at the front, and number the chairs in each row, like this."

It wasn't till I sketched an old-fashioned theatre ticket, with its coded stub, that the principle finally penetrated. "Now I understand, sir. It's like place-cards at a formal banquet, a system of assigning the more desirable locations to guests you want particularly to honor."

"Precisely." There was no need to explain that it also was a way of establishing a price scale based more on the snob-value of location than the ease of hearing and seeing. "That's why I shall myself decide who is to sit where. Let me have those lists of invites."

"Here they are, sir." He handed them to me. "But I'm afraid you won't have time to do that just now, Mr. Loring. Mr. Hanscom's waiting to see you."

"Mr. who?"

"Maxwell Hanscom of the United Nations Securities Control Board. You gave him an eleven o'clock appointment."

"Oh, yes. I remember now." I didn't have to remember. I'd been anticipating Hanscom's visit all morning, and not with pleasure. "About this Multidram demonstration, Foster. Inform Murtry I'll want to inspect the entire installation and attend a dress rehearsal." My fingers drummed the arm of my chair. "All right. Send Mr. Hanscom in."

The door to my office is thirty feet from my desk. By the time the gray little man had crossed that space, I knew that here was a government official I might be able to deceive for a little while but could not buy.

New Orleans, Manchester, Rio de Janeiro and the rest of the ten cities selected for the premiere Multridram performance of ESCAPE FROM DESTINY saw something that Spring day they'd not seen for a generation. Crowds. There was, it seemed, some strange, atavistic contagion in the notion of people actually gathering together to watch and listen to anything. The thousands who milled about the identical structures Murtry had erected could observe the proceedings sitting comfortably in their homes far better than being jostled and trampled here, but here they were.

AS SWEATING police cleared a path for me to the entrance of the New York Bijou—so Malvin Parker had named the theaters, in obeisance to our student rendezvous—I knew Billingsley Loring was on the brink of his greatest success, or at the end of his career.

Sherry was in Los Angeles, where the majority of the company were physically present, her father in Chicago supervising the master switchboard. Bart Murtry had taken off a couple of hours ago for London, to oversee the pick-up for the two British Isles stages and Paris and Moscow.

Just where Robin Adlair was I did not know. My last-minute decision anent the seating arrangements had necessitated a rush job of training ushers which Murtry had turned over to him. All the past week he'd been darting about the world in the Loring Skyfleet's speediest stratojetter and we'd completely lost track of him.

From what I saw here in New York, I had to admit that he'd done a good job. Quaintly clad in long-trousered, button-studded blue uniforms such as I hadn't seen for decades, the teen-age youngsters were well rehearsed. Not so the gathering audience. In spite of the careful letters of explanation that had accompanied each ticket, many were lamentably confused as to what was expected of them. One couple in their thirties, as a matter of fact, had to be forcibly removed from the front row seats to which they insisted they were entitled by the

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rule of first come, first served.

I'd given strict instructions that every spectator was to occupy the location his ticket called for and the Loring organization is schooled to obey instructions to the letter.

The turmoil finally subsided. I went down the central aisle to the seat I had reserved for myself. A cherub-faced lad rushed up to me, checked my stub. "A-1. Thank you, sir." He saluted and rushed busily off again. This first row of chairs was separated only by a brass rail from a six foot deep, empty trench that ran clear across the auditorium's floor. Beyond this rose the curving face of the raised stage and from this in turn, high and graceful, the shimmering golden folds of a vast curtain emblazoned with huge, floral-wreathed L's.

The sourceless illumination that filled the auditorium began to dim. A hush of tense expectancy gripped the audience. There was an instant of complete, velvety darkness, then a glitter and flash of chromium and polished wood exploded in front of and below me; musical instruments catching sudden light concentrated in the pit and splintering it into a myriad coruscations. In the blackness behind me, a thousand throats gasped. The dress-suited musicians swept bows across strings. A single handclap spatted as some oldster recalled the ways of his youth, then another, a third.

The sounds rippled, spread, merged into a torrent of applause.

The clapping died away. The orchestra's triumphal strains waned till only a single violin sang softly. An aureate glow spread over the great curtain and it was rising, slowly at first, then more swiftly.

The stage it revealed was vacant! Bare floorboards stretched back to a blank wall of gray plasticrete. Something had gone wrong.

No. The stage was transformed into a room ugly with the flowered design of its papered walls, shut in by the black cloth awkwardly tacked over windows. Clumsy wooden furniture cluttered it, a table was covered by a white cloth and set as for a meal not yet served. In the left-hand side-wall—the stage's left—was a closed door, a wooden door complete with ceramic door-knob. Another, similar door to the right rear was open a bare inch. Holding it so and peering through the crack was a woman's taut, listening figure.

Slumped in a chair by the table, head propped in elbow-propped hands and every line eloquent of a fatigue that rendered him incapable of the fear that gripped the woman, was a young man in clothing torn, filthy with mud.

The applause rose again in a great, cresting wave that washed over me.

Underlying the surf of pounding palms was another, rhythmic sound the world has not heard for decades, the ominous thud of marching feet dulled by distance. Nearing it beat down the applause, seemed just outside the black-swathed windows.

A voice suddenly barked an unintelligible order. Silence. A sense of apprehension flowed from the woman at the door, a feeling of fear that could not possibly have been transmitted to that audience by a video image. The unseen voice spoke again, guttural, and the feet thudded again dispersing.

"They've tracked you to the village," the woman whispered. "They're searching the houses along the street." She pushed the door shut, soundlessly, turned from it.

HAND to throat she moved across the floor toward the unmoving man at the table, eyes big with terror in a white and haggard face. In Neva's face! Neva—No not Neva of course but her daughter Sherry—whispered. "They'll be here in a moment. Come, I'll hide you."

Why was Sherry playing the part for which Lilli Denton had rehearsed? I was out of my seat. Crouching low to avoid being silhouetted against the lighted stage I made for its left-hand corner.

"I'm not hiding." The voice above me was hoarse with weariness and defeat. "I'm going out there to give myself up. You people have suffered enough—" It faded as I went through the little door and found myself in a place crowded with the glowing bulbs, the coils and condensers and serpentining leads of the Multidram apparatus.

The air was prickly with the tension of high potential, an incautious movement here might mean instant and terrible death. Explaining the setup last week, Bart Murtry had warned me not to brush against this lead, this switch. I was tight-strung, my palms sweating, by the time I reached the wings and looked through what to the audience seemed to be a papered wall, a closed door, out into the black dark of the auditorium.

I could make out clearly only the first row

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of rapt faces, the gap made by the aisle and the seat I'd left unoccupied. Directly in front of me the man was on his feet now, Sherry beside him, their backs to me as, frozen in consternation, they watched the other door thud shut behind a bull-necked individual who snatched an automatic from the belt-holster of his green uniform.

His lips stretched in a humorless, sinister smile. "As I thought." Vindictive lights crawled in his skin-pouched eyes. "I knew only you and your blackguard husband would dare give this pig a refuge. That is why I sent my men to search the other houses and came here alone."

The woman gathered herself, forced out words. "You mean that your silence can be purchased, Captain Markin. With what? We have nothing left with which to bribe you."

"Except yourself, my dear Elsa—not forced but willing. You are a fever in my veins and—" Markin cut off as the door here before me flew open and a gaunt man stepped through into the scene, a revolver clutched in his lifting hand.

"Franz!" Elsa exclaimed but the shots crashed in a single report. The captain turned. Franz folded, clutching his chest.

A scream shrilled from the audience, a shout husky with terror. Ushers were running down the aisle to where a man had jumped up and was pointing with shaking hand at the seat in which I should be sitting.

I stood on a stage abruptly bare again. The figures that had occupied it had vanished. Robin Adlair stepped out of the other wing, stared out into the auditorium, at the front row seat the bright pleon of whose back was gashed by the bullet that had ploughed into it and, had I been sitting there, would have smashed into my chest instead.

CHAPTER IV

Nine-Fold Killing

OTHERS were not as fortunate as I. In Chicago, in London, in Rio de Janerio, in each of the theaters where a fascinated audience had watched the premiere performance of a Multidrama, a bullet had ploughed into the occupant of seat A-1. A single shot, fired from a single stage had slain nine men in nine separate cities scattered over half the world.

"One of the strange features of this case," Rand Pardeen said later, "is that our examination of the guns used in the play discloses that only blanks were fired from them." Burly, rock-jawed and steel-eyed, the Chief Inspector of UN's World Police had requested me to assemble in his office all of us who were primarily responsible for the Multidram; Malvin and Sherry Parker, Bart Murtry, Robin Adlair. "No molecules of lead were found in the barrel of the one fired in Los Angeles by the actor who played Franz, or of that which the character of Captain Markin shot off in London."

"How about the bullets?" Sherry asked. None of us looked particularly chipper but she seemed especially worn, probably from the strain of stepping into the role of Elsa when Lilli Denton was taken suddenly ill the very morning of the performance. "I—" she smiled wanly. "I have a secret vice, inspector. I once found a collection of ancient detective books Dad made when he was a boy and I've read them all. According to them, the police always extract the murder bullet from the corpse and examine it to find out from what gun it came."

Pardeen appeared grimly amused. "Quite right, Miss Parker. We should have done exactly that except for another odd circumstance. The surgeons who performed the autopsies on the bodies of the nine murdered men found no bullet in any of them."

The stir this announcement evoked gave me a chance to glance again at the gray little man who sat inconspicuously in a corner, nursing a brief case. Why was Maxwell Hanscom here? Why should the UN Securities Control Board be represented at the investigation of a crime?

"Your people must have slipped up somehow, Mr. Pardeen," Mal Parker was saying. "Nine of the slugs obviously were material images which were dissipated the instant I pulled the master switch in Chicago, shutting down the network, but there must have been a real prototype that continued to exist. You should have found it."

"We did," Pardeen replied. "We found it, not buried in the chest of any of the dead men, but in the upholstery of the seat Mr. Loring would have occupied had he not so opportunely decided to go backstage."

My fingers closed on my chair's arms so tightly the edges dug into flesh. "The actual shot was fired in New York, then. It was

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meant for me. I was the one the murderer was after."

"So it would seem, Mr. Loring. The killer knew where you would be seated. He knew there was a moment in the play when the sound of his shot would be covered by shots on the stage. Apparently he did not know his missile would be reproduced so that it would kill nine others, and that seems to eliminate all of you who are familiar with the mechanics of this thing."

"I disagree, Inspector." Pardeen's gray eyes moved to Murtry, who went on, "It eliminates none of us."

PARDEEN stared at Murtry with somber interest. "You suggest that the slayer didn't care how many others died as long as his shot reached his intended victim?"

"I do not. I mean that as far as any of us knew, no one but Mr. Loring would be reached by a shot fired at him from the New York stage. The Multidram receiver and transmitter fields were supposed to end sharply at the outer edge of the orchestra pits. If that had been the case, only the actual bullet would have passed beyond the vertical plane of the brass rail that edged the pit."

"Very good, Bart," Robin Adlair drawled. "A very sound point—and an excellent red herring."

"Red herring!" Murtry pushed up out of his chair, black eyes blazing. "What in blazes are you getting at?"

"Whatever you want to make of it," the blond chap grinned, but his implication was clear. A clever killer well might try to avert suspicion from himself by disputing a theory that seemed to exculpate him from suspicion. "I'm curious about one thing, though. What makes you so sure the shot came from the stage?"

The other's lips pulled back from his teeth in what he might have meant for a smile but was more like a snarl. "That's obvious to anyone but a moron, or someone who'd like to have us think it was fired from somewhere else. Coming from anywhere in the auditorium it could not have struck the back of the seat." The smoldering antagonism founded in their rivalry for Sherry was no longer covert but had flared into an open feud.

"It seems to me, Mr. Robin Adlair," Murtry purred, "that you've more reason to draw herrings across the trail than I."

I could read Pardeen's mind as he glanced from one to the other. "Keep up the squabble, boys," he was thinking, "and maybe one of you will drop the clue I'm looking for."

"I seem to recall," Murtry continued, "that when the lights went on you were standing there on the New York stage."

"Right." The blonde giant grinned. "I figured on getting to the New York Bijou in time to check the set, but the crowd outside held me up and I got inside the entrance, which is on the right of the house, just as the lights were dimming. I thought I could still make it but was caught on the right of the stage by the curtain going up, couldn't cross without exposing myself."

"You were delayed, all right," Murtry snapped back at him. "You reached the wings just as the actors were about to fire their blanks and you had to get off your own shot so fast that you didn't notice Mr. Loring wasn't where he was supposed to be."

He'd slipped the noose around Adlair's neck as neatly as I could have. "No, Robin," Sherry moaned. "No. You couldn't!"

"Yes, kitten, I could." The fellow seemed oddly unperturbed. "Our Bart has built up a swell case against me. Hasn't he, Inspector?" He transferred his lazy grin to Pardeen. "Almost as good a case as you had when you were about to arrest me. And it suffers from the same defect."

"I'm afraid it does," the law officer agreed. "You see, Mr. Murtry, the weapon whose rifling the murder bullet matches was found some ten minutes after the shot was fired and while Mr. Adlair still was in the custody of the New York police, on the stage of the Chicago theater."

That really was a crusher. Eyes met widening eyes in puzzlement, breaths sighed in an almost eerie hush which was broken by Adlair's chuckle. "Maybe you can figure that one out, Bart."

"Maybe I can." Murtry wasn't beaten yet. "In fact, I know that answer. What you did was to cache your gun in Chicago, within the area the receiver there would scan. When the Multidram was switched on, it was reproduced at the same spot on all the stages. You picked up its material image in New York, loaded it with a real cartridge which in turn was recreated in the other nine theaters and fired it.

"Doctor Parker turned off the current and presto!—no gun on you, nothing to connect you with the gun in Chicago. Except—"

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was he who grinned now, triumphantly. "Except, Inspector Pardeen, that the flash-back of powder gases from the real cartridge will have left their mark on the skin of his right hand."

"Good boy!" The inspector jumped up. "That does it. We'll apply the wax test, right here and now." He strode to the door, jerked it open. "Jenkins," he called. "Ashkinazy. I've got a little job for you."

THERE was a muttered conference at the door, a wait, then two uniformed men came in carrying a tray with some simple apparatus on it. As, still smiling but a little uneasily, Robin Adlair submitted to their ministrations the man from the UN spoke for the first time.

"You know, Inspector Pardeen, there's something about this that still bothers me."

"What's that?"

"Why the Multidram field was enlarged to include Mr. Loring's seat. There doesn't seem to have been any reason for that."

Pardeen looked at Murtry but I answered for him. "Does there have to be a reason, Mr. Hanscom? I imagine it was a slight, if unfortunate misadjustment of the control apparatus in Chicago. After all, Mr. Parker was undoubtedly a little excited over the first public test of his new invention and—well, he isn't as young as he used to be."

"Meaning that I'm superannuated, Billiken?" Mal Parker demanded, bristling. "Why don't you pension me off, if that's the case?"

"Perhaps I will, Mal," I couldn't resist responding. "Remind me to consider it after your protege has been properly taken care of."

"Pardon me, Mr. Loring," Hanscom intervened. "I don't want to seem persistent but I can't help wondering if the misadjustment need necessarily have been made at the central controls in Chicago."

"Now look here, Hanscom," I flared. "What right have you—"

"Just a minute, Billiken," Mal Parker interrupted me. "Since that concerns me directly, I'd like to clear it up. The answer to your question, Mr. Hanscom, is that all ten Multidram transceivers were electronically interlocked so as to avoid the possibility of overlapping or other faulty registry. A change in the adjustment of any one would affect them all. Look. I'll draw you a diagram that will make it clear. May I have a paper and pencil, Inspector?"

Pardeen started to fish in his pocket, turned to the slender, sharp-featured officer who approached him. "Well, Ashkinazy, what have you got?"

Mask-faced, the chap held out a crinkling film of wax. "Look for yourself, sir." It showed the roughnesses of Adlair's skin, and nothing else. "That guy didn't shoot off any gun in the last twenty-four hours, not with either hand."

There was a small, hawking sound in Bart Murtry's throat, from Sherry Parker a glad cry as she flew to the blond giant. "I knew it, Robin. I knew you didn't do it."

"So did I, honey," he grinned as he caught her and held her. "But someone did. I wonder if it wasn't the one who tried to fasten it on me." His broad face was abruptly grim. "I suggest, Inspector, that you submit Bart Murtry to this same test."

"Why Murtry?" Maxwell Hanscom asked. "We have absolute proof that he was in London at the time of the murders." He seemed suddenly to have taken over command of the proceedings and the frightening thing was that Pardeen let him. "Why not Billingsley Loring?"

"That's absurd!" I flared. "Are you intimating that I tried to murder myself, Mr. Hanscom?"

He turned those penetrating cold gray eyes on me.

"No, Mr. Loring. I'm simply recalling that like Mr. Adlair, you were on the stage of the New York theater in position to fire the real bullet in the imaged gun. In position also, as Mr. Adlair was not, to have made the slight change in the transceiver's setting that resulted in the death of the nine men to whom you'd sent tickets to seat A-one. The same nine men who brought against you the charges I've been investigating of fraudulent operation of corporations whose stock they bought from you, and without whose evidence the charges must be dropped."

Inspector Pardeen was coming toward me and his uniformed aides were closing in on me from either side but I saw only Neva's shocked eyes, Neva's color-drained, cameo features.

"No," Neva's daughter whispered. "No, Uncle Billiken. You couldn't have."

But I had. It was the only way I could have saved the great commercial empire I'd slaved for years to build. What were the lives of nine money-grubbers against that?

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The Seekers

By ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

A refugee from earth warns the spaceship crew of the grim weapons hidden by the Martians—but they scoff knowingly. . . .

HE CAME to the door of his quiet study and looked out, feeling—*teleketing* the evening breeze blowing in from the red deserts, seeing the slanting sunlight and the shadows on the domes and balconies and flat roofs of this ancient city. The town occupied the crater of an extinct volcano that had been hollowed out so long ago that all memory of the first builders had been lost, even by a race that forgot nothing. The breeze was soft and gentle, the city was quiet amidst its ancient memories. But he could *teleket*—smell trouble.

For a moment the thought that he had finally achieved mastery of *teleket,* of that strange sense possessed by most Martians who lived here in Thaliknon, their holy city, gave him a feeling of elation. He had spent years in patient labor, striving to master *teleket,* the awareness of the pattern of things, the shape sometimes of coming events. Now, if only for a moment, he was successful! Then the feeling faded and he recognized it as intuition and the source of it. Another ship had landed today, from Earth. Men, more men, were here on Mars.

Wherever men were, there was trouble, there was change, there was a shifting, elusive pattern of hopes and dreams, a pattern so varied that even Vondrar, chief of the Martian librarians, could not grasp it entirely, could not follow its probabilities through to termination point.

He sighed. He had been happy here, in this quiet place, studying the science of a race that had been seeking first causes before men tamed animals and learned to plant grain. First causes—the starting points of a universe that contained galaxies and milky ways and suns and planets and Martians and men, and the dream of both—this the Martians had sought for twice ten thousand years, without a satisfactory result.

It was in his mind that this seeking would have to be postponed, for men, more men, were here. He followed the elusive feeling through his mind, seeking by free association to determine why the thought of men was somehow tied up with the thought of trouble. It was just that way. Maybe there was a reason that logic could grasp, maybe there was only a *teleket* reason. But there was a reason. Looking out, he saw that two human beings were coming toward him.

THEY saw him and waved. Their stride quickened. He could see the hesitant smile on their faces as though they were eager to talk to him but were not quite sure of their welcome. They waved again and he saw that the second human being was a woman.

A woman on Mars! Somehow the thought shocked him. Once he had wanted a woman to come with him to Mars, but she had preferred another way of life, the beauty shop in the morning and bridge in the afternoon, a concert of possibly more bridge in the evening. Somehow, remembering that woman, he was startled to see a woman on Mars. But he knew it would happen sooner or later. It was bound to happen. There were *some* women on earth who would follow their men, going with them where they went, to the ends

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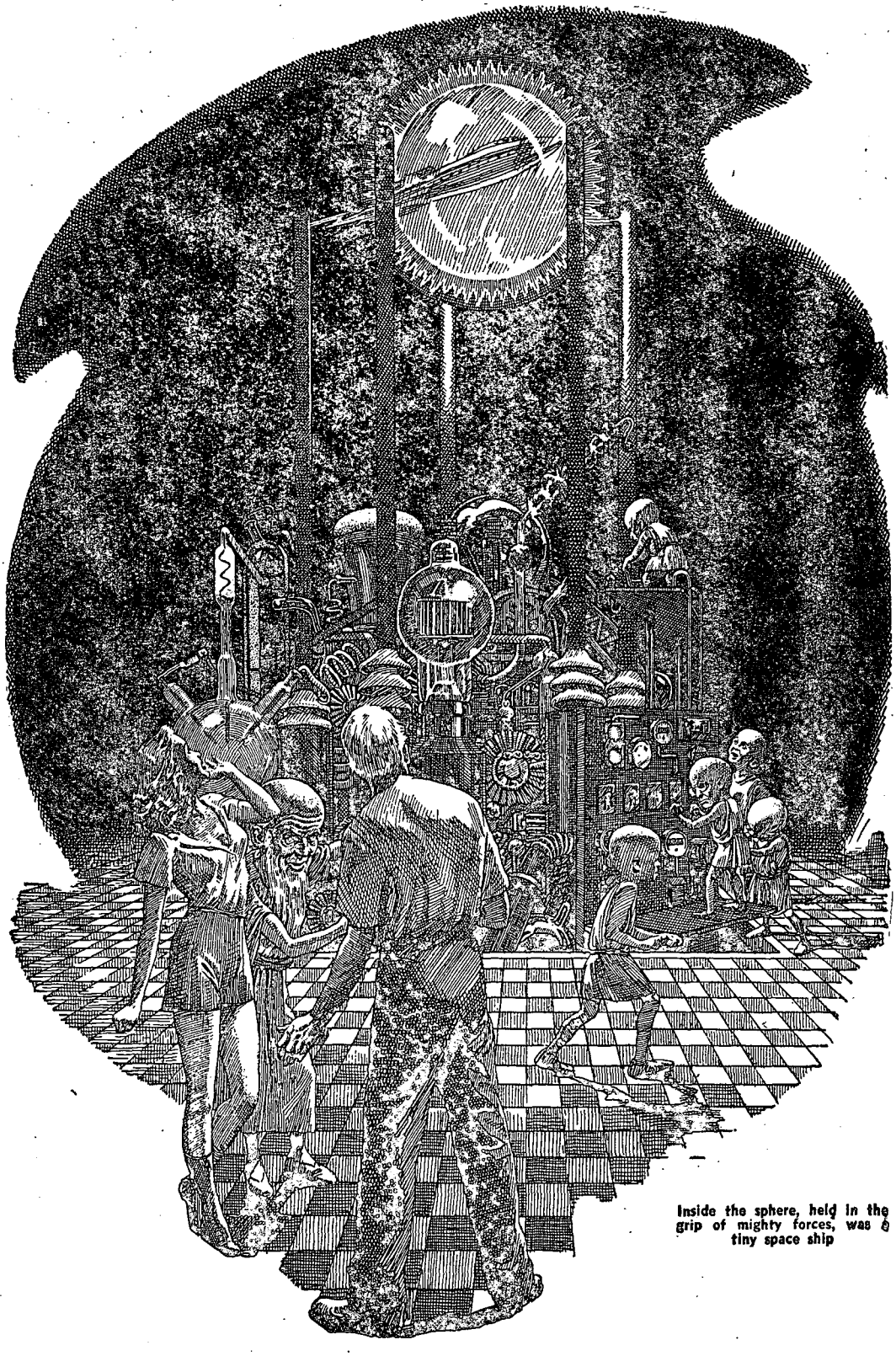

Inside the sphere, held in the grip of mighty forces, was a tiny space ship

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of the earth and following along the paths beyond the ends of the earth.

The man trotted up, slender but with a suggestion of strength in his lithe body, a pack on his back.

Words bubbled from his lips, tumbling over each other in his eagerness to get them said.

"They said we would find you here. We looked—They said—" Then the words ended in a single explosive syllable, "Dad!"

This was probably the biggest shock in John Forbes' life. This man was his son. He shook hands.

"I—I had forgotten," he said.

He saw the hurt look on his son's face and he was sorry he had spoken so quickly. He must remember he was dealing with men again, with a people where lies were still sometimes necessary, not with Martians, who abhorred the slightest deviation from the truth.

He had told the truth and hurt his son, somewhere deep inside. He would not have done this willingly but the words had popped out unbidden. Now how could he explain to this boy—to this man—how it was possible for him to forget that he even had a son? How could he explain the fascination of the mysteries here in this place, mysteries so great that they drove from the mind all ordinary thoughts, mysteries stupendous enough to make a man forget his son?

"I'm sorry." He sought through his mind for the still forgotten name, "Hal. Some day you will understand."

Hal Forbes swallowed. "Forget it," he said. "It's nothing. I want you to meet my wife."

John Forbes found himself shaking hands with this brown-skinned girl who smiled at him. The perturbation inside of him kept him from noticing whether she was pretty, as if prettiness mattered. Here was a new fact to fit into the person equation of his life. These two people would make him a grandfather, maybe already had!

"Your mother?" Forbes asked his son.

"She made two grand slams the week we blasted off," Hal answered.

They let the subject drop, each of them intuitively recognizing that there was nothing to be done about mistakes, except ignore them.

"You came in on the ship that landed today?"

He saw his son's face darken. "Yes," Hal answered, angrily. *Teleket,* John Forbes thought, in his mind.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"Nothing, that I know for certain," his son answered. His face changed and a smile showed. "But I didn't come here to talk about that. I came here to talk to you. Tell me, about yourself and about this city."

He could see eagerness in their faces, the same keen eagerness that he had once felt—and felt still.

"We would need a century to begin to tell about this place," he said. "But come in." He stood aside for them to enter the study where he spent his days.

It was a quiet place, with comfortable chairs and a sturdy table with a shaded glow lamp over it. The small room to the left was where he slept and beyond that was the little kitchen where he prepared his own meals. The table was littered with spools of the Martian equivalent of microfilm. Lying beside the projector was one of the strange jewels that Vondrar had given him, as a paper weight. The girl's eyes went to it and she exclaimed over the beauty of it and picked it up, asking a question.

CAUGHT and held within some plastic so clear and so transparent that it was almost invisible was an animal, a *dothar,* the Martian camel of the red deserts. The jewel was about an inch in diameter and was fitted with a flat-sided mounting so that it would stay put when used as a paper weight.

"This is a marvelous piece of work!" Jennie Forbes gasped. "Every hair, every wrinkle on the skin, even the expression on the beast's face, is here. Do they have artists here who can do work like this?" She seemed excited at the thought.

"They did have, once. Maybe they still have them. I haven't thought about it."

"What do they have in the way of manpower and weapons?" his son spoke. "I was told to ask you that," he added, his voice fierce and hard.

"What is this ship that brought you?" Forbes said. He did not need *teleket* now to understand the source and the nature of the trouble he had sensed.

"Officially, it's a scientific expedition, organized and financed by a man by the name of Vrain. We blasted off with a lot of scientific ballyhoo about exploration of Mars. Jennie and I are worried." His troubled eyes sought his wife.

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"We are afraid we were taken in," she said. "We suspect the only reason we were asked to come is because of you. It is known that you have been living here since the first ship landed on Mars. We think that Vrain plans to use us, and you, to obtain information about the riches and the strength of this city. And after that—" Her voice trailed off.

"We're not sure of it," Hal said. "We just suspect it."

"Riches?" John Forbes said. His mind was slow to grasp the meaning of the term. The riches of the mind, the riches of stored knowledge, he knew. Other forms, like gold and silver and wealth, he had forgotten.

The girl pointed to the jewel he used as a paper weight. "Do you have any idea what that would be worth to a museum on earth?"

"Well, no."

"You could name your own price. And we saw other things on our way here, statues, paintings, plain ordinary stone benches inlaid with silver and gold."

"But those things are works of art!"

"That's what the museums would think."

"But they are!"

"We're not arguing with you," Hal spoke. "Vrain is arguing with you. Here's something we didn't know when we agreed to come on this expedition. Vrain is actually not a scientist, he is a publicist who has made himself a big reputation by writing a series of enormously popular books on science, books that I now think must surely have been ghost written.

"He has written and lectured so much that in the eyes of the public he is Mr. Science himself. When he dreamed up the idea of this expedition, he raised the money for the ship and the crew by public subscription. He plans to take back from Mars, art objects, gold, gems, whatever there is of value, to peddle to museums and private collectors on Earth. He will make himself ten to twenty million dollars."

John Forbes was dazed. The cupidity of men he had forgotten too. "How will he get these art objects?" he questioned. New and unsought thoughts were pouring in on him in a roaring flood. Men and the grasping natures of men, had gone from his mind.

"Trade for them, if he can," his son said bitterly. "He brought a cargo of trade goods, knives, beads, necklaces."

"Does he think these people are Indians?"

"He doesn't know and he doesn't care. If he can trade, all right. If he can't trade—well, he wants me to find out the strength and the weapons of this city."

His son's voice was hot with a rising anger. "And I want you to tell me there are ten thousand fighting men here. I want you tell me there are disintegrators here, death rays. He'll believe it because he isn't good enough scientist to know the truth. He would fear explosive rays that could blow his ship to dust, if he tries anything!"

His son's eyes were on John Forbes, begging him to tell a story of weapons. The Martians were an old, old race weren't they? Any race that had lived in peace long enough to grow old—or to grow at all—had the strength that comes of weapons. Or that was the way it had worked on earth.

JOHN FORBES shook his head. "I have never seen a fighting man or a weapon in this city," he said. "Nor anywhere else on Mars."

"But surely there's some kind of weapons?"

"Not as much as a knife."

In the silence that followed there came the far-off sound of a shout, a human voice raised in a yell in the thin air. The sound was not repeated. Looking out the window of the study, Jenny spoke.

"I feel sorry for them," she said. "They are a simple, peaceful people. A race of hunters has found them. Sometimes, on the fringe where two cultures meet, there is a leavening, a mixing of the old and the new, with each people receiving new ideas, new ways of doing things, with the result that great advances have been made."

"What?" John Forbes said.

"She is a cultural anthropologist," Hal said, proudly. "Her specialty is the study of culture patterns. She was asked to come, ostensibly, to study the mixing of Martian and earth cultures. We had hoped we might spend many years here." There was pain in the voice.

"Anthropology, yes. What little I once knew, I have forgotten." He heard the pain in his son's voice and knew that he had to take some action. He could think of two things he might do.

"Wait here," he said. "I will go talk to Vondrar and then to Vrain." He went out of the study, then turned anxiously back to the doorway. "You will wait here?" he repeated.

"We'll wait," they answered together.

Across this library city of Mars, he hur-

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ried in the thin dusk of dying day, to the huge building that was the main storehouse of information. He expected to find Vondrar in the main room, poring over the records of discoveries made so long ago that all memory of the discoverer was lost. Vondrar had spent a lifetime here in this city. A lifetime was needed to learn what was already known.

Vondrar was not in the big building. He was walking in the garden, pacing to and fro, his hands clasped behind his back, a bad sign. Vondrar was not often seen outside his beloved library. Forbes approached diffidently.

"Old friend!" he called softly. He did not wish to disturb Vondrar, not only because he knew the importance of meditation to the old Martian but because he was not sure of the extent of the powers held within those long, tapering fingers.

Vondrar heard him, left off his pacing, motioned him to come near. "There is trouble," he said, his voice booming like a drum.

"I know," Forbes said. "I came to warn you."

"What do you suggest? They have come offering us trinkets, bits of worthless metal, glass jewels."

"I am sorry."

"And they have disturbed our meditations," Vondrar went on. "The fact that they think us to be fools, attracted by glitter, I can forgive. It does not matter what they think of us. But this disturbance—old friend!" His eyes sought Forbes, questioningly. "I find this disturbance hard to forgive."

Forbes was silent. He understood and sympathized with Vondrar's problem. To all Martians who lived in this place, the quiet for meditation was very dear. Who could say when the mind speculating on first causes might, in a flash of illumination, see the clear explanation before it? Who could say when all the factors of the pattern that included milky ways and suns and planets and Martians and men might all fit into one comprehensive equation? If you meditated long enough, the answer was almost certain to come! Or so the Martians thought.

"Tell them to go away," Vondrar spoke. "Tell them not to return. Tell them this place is forbidden, forever, to all men, except—" his eyes came to Forbes "—to all except you and men like you."

"They will ask me: 'Who forbids it?'"

"What?" Amazement showed on the wrinkled face. "Who forbids it? Tell them I forbid it!"

"They will ask me on what authority you forbid anything?"

"*Authority?*" The amazement grew. "I am Vondrar, chief of the Librarians! Is not that enough?"

FORBES shook his head. "Patience, old friend, with my people. They are not yet civilized."

"Authority!"

"The only authority they will recognize is that of fighting men and guns," Forbes explained.

For a moment, he thought the old librarian was going to have heart failure. Vondrar sank down on a marble bench that was inlaid with gold and silver, worth a fortune back on Earth, and clasped his head in his hands and rocked back and forth.

"Fighting men and guns!" he whispered. "I will need years to cleanse such thoughts out of my mind." He motioned in the direction where the ship lay. "Tell them to go away."

The tone of his voice and the wave of his hand showed dismissal. Forbes knew there was no point in further argument. To Vondrar, the subject was closed. There was nothing to be gained by stating that the ship was here, that it was full of men, and that neither could be dismissed by a wave of the hand. There was no point in urging the old Martian to face reality.

Forbes went slowly away, thinking very hard. He could see only one way to accomplish what had to be done. Vrain and his ship must leave. He went to the ship. Guards paced up and down outside it.

"Take me to see Vrain," he ordered. His manner was imperious, his bearing haughty.

The guards were impressed. They took him into the ship, to the cabin of the owner. Vrain was a big man, with who-the-devil-are-you eyes. On the desk in front of him, where he had been examining it, lay one of the Martian jewels, a replica of a Martian warrior frozen in clear plastic. The thing must have been thousands of years old. Certainly warriors had not existed on Mars recently.

Toying with the jewel, Vrain leaned back in his chair and listened.

"So you must go away," Forbes said. "Believe me when I say I know what I am talking about. These people have forgotten more science than Earth has yet learned. The

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disintegrator they have is capable of turning this ship, and all its contents, into dust. It is particularly effective against steel," he concluded.

That ought to be a clincher. The ship was made of steel.

Vrain listened quietly, with every evidence of appreciation of the warning he was receiving.

"Thank you," he said.

Forbes sighed with relief. It had been easy. "Then you will leave?"

Vrain smiled. "In the face of a warning like that, what else could I do? We will be gone, in a week."

"In a week?" Forbes questioned. "I believe it might be wiser to go at once."

The smile grew larger on Vrain's face. "Or sooner. It depends on how long it takes us to finish loading."

"What?" Forbes stammered.

Vrain rose from his chair. "Get out of here, you old fool, before I wring your neck." Purple colored his face as he thought of the offense that had been given him. "Do you think I would believe such a pack of nonsense? We're leaving, all right, just as soon as we can cram this ship full."

"But—the disintegrator!"

"I heard what you told your son!" Vrain shouted. "There is no disintegrator. There is not even a knife! You said so yourself."

"I—" Forbes choked. Had Hal returned here and repeated his conversation? The thought of such treachery was an agony in his mind.

"I heard every word you said," Vrain spoke. "I didn't trust your son. He looked like a crook to me. So, when I sent him to talk to you, I had a portable radio transmitter hidden in the pack he carried. Every word either of you said, I heard! Now get out of here!"

Dazed, almost blind, Forbes stumbled out of the ship. Unknowingly he had betrayed Vondrar and Vondrar's city to the looting of barbarians! As he stumbled across the darkened city, he was aware of shouts and of lights around him in the darkness, and he knew that the looting had already begun. He hurried to his study. Jennie was waiting for him.

"Where is Hal?"

"He went back to the ship. There was a radio in his pack. He found it, and went back to demand an explanation from Vrain. Dad—"

A SOUND was in the air, a shrill sharp note that was almost beyond hearing. Something came into the study. He did not see it come, did not know what it was. But he heard it. It came with a high, thin note that was like a warning bell.

Jennie screamed.

He saw her lifted bodily, from the floor. She struggled and he tried to go to her, to help her. She screamed again and the scream was instantly cut off. She was gone from his sight.

"*Jennie!*"

She did not answer. He looked for her around the room, trying to see her. He heard the high thin note come again into the room.

Something caught him. He tried to struggle. A million tiny hands seemed to be holding him. He moved against the constant pressure of some unseen force. He felt himself lifted into the air. There was a flash of pain, then blackness. In that blackness was the sensation of movement at tremendous speed.

The blackness vanished. He had the feeling that he was being lowered swiftly but gently to the floor. He gasped for breath, feeling his heart pounding heavily.

He was in the main room of the library. Jennie was there too, looking breathless and frightened. How they had got there, he did not know, could not guess. Vondrar and all the other librarians, half a hundred of them, were there. They were busy at something he could not understand.

A section of the floor had been shoved aside. From the hidden basement thus revealed had been lifted a machine of some kind upon hydraulic supports. Martians were swarming over the machine, adjusting it, getting it ready for action. Vondrar, standing to one side, was directing their activities.

Forbes ran to Vondrar. "What—how—" He wanted to ask how he and Jennie had been brought here but he was too confused to ask the right questions.

Vondrar took time to smile at him. "You're all right, old friend? A little shock, nothing more. We brought you by controlled teleportation, because we wanted you to see what is going to happen. We brought the girl too, because she was in your quarters."

"Controlled teleportation?"

Vondrar had little time to explain. "Yes. We used this machine on you." He nodded toward the piece of equipment that had been

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stored under the sliding section of the floor. "We want you to see how we deal with those who disturb our meditations."

"Ah!"

"Watch now," Vondrar said, impatiently. "You and your kind will not be harmed. You will always be welcome here. Watch now, you and the girl, the making of the jewels."

He was holding a jewel in his hands. He caressed it. Centered in the clear, tough plastic was a beast that Forbes did not recognize. It had many arms and legs and its mouth was open, screaming.

"We called this fellow the screamer," Vondrar said. "All night long he screamed in the desert, disturbing our meditations. I was young then, and impatient. We stopped his screaming. The machine has not been used since then. There was no need, until now. Yes, when ready!" The last was spoken in booming Martian in response to a quick, questioning, over-the-shoulder look from one of the librarians working on the machine.

The librarian reached forward, closed a switch. His fingers darted over the switchboard, closing other switches, hovering over others to be closed in turn.

The vast darkened room was filled with little bell-like sounds, like atoms straining and rearranging themselves in response to the commands of a master powerful enough to command them. Above the machine, between five poles as thick as a man's leg and anchored through heavy insulators directly to hydraulic supports below them, a glow appeared, a white light so bright it hurt the eyes.

The light collected itself together into a sphere the size of an orange, and began to grow. The smell of ozone was in the air, the thin crackle of static electricity. Forbes was aware of a feeling of growing heat. He was aware of something else, too, a *teleket* feeling, a sensation of strain almost beyond the bearing of it. The sphere grew to basketball size, the feeling of strain and the heat increased. Vondrar waved his hand. The librarian closed another switch.

THE light dulled in the sphere, began to draw itself inside the surface. Then the center of the sphere was clear and free of everything except a thin tracery of smoke. Again Vondrar waved his hand. A final switch was shoved home.

The machine grunted, a heavy solid sound like the thud of a battering ram, the whole building shook to its foundations. Then the machine began to growl, like a dog with a grip on the throat of a bear and struggling to pull the heavier, mightier beast to him. Heat poured in waves through the room, blinding and suffocating. Minutes passed while the growling grew, then came the second thud.

Jennie screamed.

Inside the sphere, held in the grip of mighty forces, was—a tiny space ship, a model such as an engineer might take in mock-up.

Vondrar's smile was grim.

From the rear of the tiny model appeared tiny streamers of vapor, puffs of exploding gas, as though the jets had been put into operation.

Vondrar's dry voice cut through the grim silence. "To move that ship now, will take more power than there is in that engine."

Forbes held his breath. Suddenly he comprehended what had happened. "That is Vrain's ship!"

Vondrar nodded.

As if in confirmation, a port was opened in the model and Vrain's face stared out, a startled doll face staring out of a doll ship.

"Reduce and freeze the sphere," Vondrar ordered, in booming Martian.

"Wait!" Forbes heard himself scream.

A second port had opened. From the port looked out—the face of his son. "Wait! Vondrar! No!"

Jennie screamed again, a sound that rose above the growl beginning to sound again in the machine.

"My son!" Forbes said.

Vondrar made a quick motion with his hand. "What?" he said.

"My son," Forbes repeated.

"Your son on that ship?" There was horror on the Martian's face, horror in his voice. "He'll be dead, collapsed, frozen, within the confines of that force field—"

"Stop it. Release him. He did not know. And he warned me and he tried to warn you through me. He tried to help. Stop it."

"If I release the field, if I build up the ship to normal size, they will fly away," Vondrar answered grimly. "This machine had a very limited range. If I let them escape, they will come back, or others like them, with guns. Tell me, am I not right?"

In that moment, Forbes wished he could lie, he wished he could say that never again

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would a man visit this city with the intention of looting it. But he knew his race, he knew them as thieves with noses for loot, and he knew they would come again, openly or by subterfuge, with fine stories on their lips and murder in their hearts.

He knew they would do it. They had done it, with few exceptions, through their whole history. They would continue to do it until they learned better, not just a few, but all of them. So he would have liked to lie. But he knew Vondrar would detect any lie he tried to tell. Truth was a fetish with these people. They worshipped it above all other gods. For a liar they had *no* toleration. So he nodded, whispered from dry lips.

"You are right."

"I will hang this jewel as a warning at the gates of this city," Vondrar thundered. "Then they will not come back, nor will others come, without permission, to disturb our meditation, because they will have my warning before their eyes."

"But my *son?*"

"I am sorry about your son. You should have taught him not to consort with thieves." His hand moved. In response to it, switches were closed on the machine. Waves of blasting heat began to foul the air.

"Wait!"

FORBES screamed and threw himself upon Vondrar, beat at the Martian with helpless fists. He was seized and lifted away. "Then let me be with him," he said.

"And let me be with him too," Jennie spoke.

Vondrar looked amazed. "But that means death."

"The life in the jewel is no less dead than the life I lead here," Forbes heard himself say. And he knew, suddenly, that *teleket,* the shape of things to come, the awareness of realities around him, was on him. It was like a trance. In that trance he saw the truth. And he spoke it:

"You are dead, as dead as the creatures that you lock in these jewels for disturbing your meditations. You think you seek first causes here. For ten thousand years you and others like you have been seeking first causes here. Have you reached any conclusion, have you grasped any first cause?"

The Martians stared at him, aware that he was speaking out of *teleket,* and awed by that fact. "Answer me," he shouted.

Vondrar was in confusion. "No," he admitted. "Not time enough. I mean, we haven't yet."

"And you never will, because you and the life you lead here, are dead, frozen off from the main stream of life. You thought trouble was coming because men were coming. And I, as big a fool as you, thought the same thing. It was not trouble, it was change. A race with life in it was meeting a dead race. That meant change for you. You thought change was trouble, you did not realize it was your great opportunity."

His voice went on. This library city, he now saw what it was, the storehouse of all Martian knowledge, but a dead end, as much a dead end as the screamer caught in the frozen force field and screaming there in silence forever, as much a dead end as the ancient Martian warrior. As he spoke he could see distress forming on Vondrar's face, and something of respect and conviction. Vondrar respected *teleket,* he respected truth, and he recognized both.

"It is only in the meeting of two cultures, it is only in the fringe state where two varying forces meet, that progress is ever made," Forbes went on, and Jennie, at least, seemed to know instantly what he meant.

"You've got to let them meet," she spoke, "If it means trouble and disturbance, it also means progress."

Vondrar was lost in thought. The sphere in the machine held the same size and the same faces looked out from the ports, startled faces looking at a world that had changed tremendously and incomprehensibly. The people in the toy ship were trying to understand what had happened. And Vondrar in his own way was trying to understand it, to fit the parts together into a comprehensive whole.

"You've got to let the races meet," Forbes repeated. "It is only in the meeting of new minds that new thoughts are born, new avenues opened to old goals."

There was amazement and something more than amazement on the face of the Martian.

"Old wisdom from a young race," he said. He seemed to have made up his mind. A smile was forming on his face. "I was about to repeat an old mistake here, the same mistake I made with the screamer."

He looked at the jewel he held in his hand. "How often at night, after he was gone, did I lie awake, listening for the sound of his scream in the desert night? And not hearing it."

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He seemed to be in a trance too. Still looking at the jewel, he spoke:

"How often did I wish I could hear you scream just once again!"

He looked up. He waved his hand. His eyes came to Forbes, smiling.

And Forbes knew he had won a victory in the only possible way it could have been won, not by a display of power—what was power against the machine they raised from below the floor—but by reaching the sense of justice of the Martian, and more than that, by showing Vondrar how the Martians might go forward to old, long-sought goals.

On the machine, switches were closed, other switches opened. There was a thud, as of a battering ram striking one last blow and breaking down again a door against it. Little silver bells rang. And the room was suddenly cold, terribly icy, as the machine seemed to suck up the last vestige of heat in effecting some tremendous transformation of energy.

The cold grew. Breath showed white and rime frost gathered on the walls and floors as heat was converted. Then the switches were yanked open by shivering Martians.

The sphere was empty, vacant. The model ship was gone.

MINUTES later, in a vast wave cold, the machine was stopped. John Forbes staggered outside.

Off in the sky rockets were already barking as the frightened Vrain hustled his ship into the sky as soon as he was certain it could be done, as soon as he knew the terrific force that had seized him had been released. Forbes knew it would be many a day before Vrain would venture near this place again. He listened to the rockets roar in the sky. Jennie came out and stood beside him. And Vondrar came. They listened to the sound.

"It was well spoken, what you said," Vondrar spoke.

"Perhaps you have lost the quiet of your city, but you have gained something," Forbes answered. "I am glad I was able to show you the truth."

"The truth? Well." Vondrar seemed to think of other, far-away things. "You mean about new ideas being born of the meeting of new races? Well, that is something to think, about, something to consider. But—"

"It was for that reason you released the ship, was it not?" Forbes gasped. He could not imagine any other reason that would move Vondrar. What reason could move this ancient, learned Martian, this librarian who had forgotten more than most men ever managed to learn?

"Well." Vondrar seemed uncomfortable. "That was part of the reason."

"And the other part?" Forbes persisted. He was aware that Jennie was trying to stop him from asking these questions, as if she understood what Vondrar meant. But he did not understand.

"Eh?" Vondrar said. "Old friend, should I take from you—" He hesitated, listening.

Forbes heard the feet running through the darkness, heard the voice shouting, "Dad! Where are you?"

"Should I take from you what is more important than all philosophy, a grandson?" Vondrar finished, grinning. His chuckle was soft in the darkness, but full of meaning and of understanding of forces strong enough to move planets and suns and milky ways and universes.

NEXT ISSUE'S FEATURED NOVEL

THE VALLEY OF CREATION, by EDMOND HAMILTON

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JOURNEY

By GEORGE O. SMITH

Nobody believes Ted Murray when he claims he has been to Alpha Centauri, the outpost of space!

JOSEPH FARNSWORTH spoke with lofty disdain.

"You are nothing but a publicity-seeker!" he said.

"That is untrue," replied Ted Murray. "Someone—"

"I know," interrupted Farnsworth scornfully. "Someone has to go. I've heard that for years. So what good will it do?"

"Some new principle might be revealed."

"Bah! A hundred million dollars a year for twelve years poured into this insane project. Before that those of your sort squandered money to reach Venus and Mars and the Moon, knowing full and well that nothing could be found there that was worth a penny. No," snapped Farnsworth as the younger man opened his mouth for rebuttal. "Shut up! I'm doing the talking. I'll continue until I'm finished and then you can leave. Alone! So having found nothing of value on any of the available planets, now you must try for Alpha Centauri. An idiotic program, I claim."

"The money was not entirely wasted," replied Murray stoutly.

"They did not uncover anything that mightn't be discovered right here on Earth with a little effort," snapped Farnsworth. "So far as I can see, all you'll get out of this is your name in all the papers and the newsreels. And when and if you return, you'll be able to loaf the rest of your life away by writing fool books and making stupid speeches.

"No, Murray, I have a great amount of

The guard was kissing Diane when Ted Murray came up behind them

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respect for honest science. But if you want to be a scientist, why didn't you study something useful? Frankly, my opinion is that you will be taking advantage of all of those billions of dollars to perform an act of questionable value and, by it, win fame as an adventurer."

"But there may be a wealth of information to be gained."

"All right, you hope to find livable planets there? So what? How many people will be able to afford such a jaunt to colonize? Very few and those that can have better sense. Years of time spent in space and a billion dollars' worth of sheer—fireworks!"

MURRAY shrugged. "Years of travel, yes," he agreed. "But with the quick-freezer, I'll view it as a matter of winking my eyes. There is no danger, you know."

"Excepting the chance that you'll miss Alpha, that you'll undershoot or overshoot it."

Murray shook his head. "We've finders and proximity-operated devices."

"And if they go rotten—which well they may after the years in space?"

"Well, they may, yet there is all the reason and experience in the world to believe that they will not."

The door opened at this point and Diane Farnsworth entered. Her expression was one of hope. She looked at her father quizzically.

He shook his head. "No," he said with finality. "This crazy project is out." He looked at Ted Murray. "Perhaps if you must take this jaunt alone, you'll think twice and put some effort into something worthy."

Diane looked from her father to Ted. "Ted," she said simply, "I'll not ask you to stay—or to go. I do want you, you know, but I'll not stand in the way of your life's work."

"You'll be ten years older by the time I get there," said Murray. "And twenty years older by the time I return. It means good-by, you know."

"I know, Ted. But I'll be waiting."

Farnsworth roared in sarcastic laughter. "Yeah," he sneered at them both. "Wait for a fly-by-night for twenty years? Don't be stupid, Diane. Now, Murray, get out of here and head for Alpha Centauri. Then, at least, you'll be out of my sight!" He turned to Diane. "And you stay here!"

"No," she said.

"Want to elope, huh?" grunted Farnsworth. He picked up the telephone, put through a call to Washington. "Harris?" he said when the connection was made. "Harris, my daughter thinks she wants to elope with Ted Murray in that cockeyed star-ship project. If she's permitted within a thousand feet of the thing I'll have everybody's head on a platter."

"I'll have a guard there," said Harris. He laughed genially. "Stowing away on that crate would be very slightly less difficult than carving your initials on the bottom gold-brick at Fort Knox and taking away the shavings."

Farnsworth hung up with a grim smile. "Now," he said to the couple, "do it if you can!"

A few hours later the ship was ready to take off. Diane Farnsworth was standing beside a member of the F.B.I. when the huge, five-step rocket blared fire and raised itself on a pillar of flame. She waved once, knowing that Ted could not see her, and then burst into bitter tears as the ship lifted into the afternoon sky.

Miles above, there was a burst of flame as the first step was fired loose. The winking light in the sky grew fainter and then was gone. Only those equipped with telescopes saw the second step fire loose.

The crowd was gone before the first two steps came floating down on parachutes.

Twenty-four hours later, Ted Murray checked his course for the last time and coupled in the automatic correcting machines. He checked the finder 'scope as a last precaution to be certain that his ship would drive on Alpha Centauri. Then satisfied, Ted Murray smoked a last cigarette before he stepped to the quick-freeze cabinet.

A few moments later, Ted Murray was, to all intents and purposes, dead. In his body, all molecular motion had slowed to a near-stop—not quite Absolute Zero.

From here on, the trip to the stars was in the lap of the gods, placed there by excellent and delicate engineering. Unaided but not unguided, the star ship would cross the void at man's highest velocity but at a mere crawl as cosmic distances go. Such a trip would have been impossible without some sort of suspended animation, for the food alone for such a prolonged trip would have prevented it. Now, it was but a matter of time. . . .

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TO TED MURRAY, the trip seemed not more than a wink. There had been a very brief wave of painful chill caused by the fact that his nervous system had a few milliseconds in which to carry the pain-stimuli before the nervous system itself was shut off.

Then nothing—until now. The painful chill was not repeated, but the cabinet was cold inside. Ted stepped out quickly, and found that the cabin-heating elements had started properly as the ship came close to Alpha Centauri.

And Alpha Centauri was there, a glorious double sun at a distance about equivalent to the distance from Sol to Jupiter.

Planets? No point in just looking. To scour the heavens with the telescope in the hope of finding a recognizable disc would be a job for ages. There were better ways, so long as he was traveling so fast. Murray set the course with a few correcting blasts so that his ship would swing in a parabolic arc around the double sun by gravity, and then took the hemisphere cameras from their locker.

The film was bound to be weak and fogged no matter how well it had been preserved, but it, too, had been well tested. He inserted the film and set the hemisphere cameras to cover the entire heavens. Then while they were running, Ted Murray ate, smoked, and took stock of the ship that had been running free all through the years of travel.

Everything was in fine shape. The utter chill had done wonders to prevent deterioration, though the designers had put nothing into the star ship that the years would harm. With everything quite acceptable, Ted Murray leaned back in a chair near the window and watched the sky.

Some of the constellations seemed a bit distorted, others were as memory told him they should be. He looked for and located Sol.

Sol.

His home lay untold miles away and almost ten years of travel. Light itself would take four years to get there—and the light he was seeing now had left Sol four years ago. Sol might have become a nova in the past four years and he could not know it.

His home. It seemed only yesterday that he had left Diane. Diane was thirty years old, now. A lot could happen in ten years. He smiled wistfully. Though it seemed but a matter of hours since he had seen her, it was ten years since she had seen him. Memory, he knew, was best when it was new. Time is the great healer.

No doubt Diane had married and might even be trailing a couple of kids by now, and if her memory had been reasonably short, the older of them might even be graduating from high school by the time he returned. Reverie caught up with him, and he daydreamed a bit of sheer idealistic romance between himself and the beautiful daughter of his former love. He, himself would be fifty by the time he returned, but he would look no older and would act no older and would truly be no older than thirty—and why not?

At any rate, here he was before Alpha Centauri and with an entirely new solar system to bring back to hurl at Joseph Farnsworth with a sneer. If, of course, Joseph Farnsworth still lived. A bitter joke to return with something wonderful to report only to find that Joseph Farnsworth no longer existed to eat his words.

So passed the hours while the hemisphere cameras were locating planets that he himself could not tell from stars without a long-planned search. So passed the hours alternating between wonder, pleasure at seeing the double sun, and the sweet reminiscing of Diane. Murray alternated himself between regret at leaving her and exultation at being the first man ever to see another star at close hand.

SO PASSED the hours into days as the cosmic-crawl of man's fastest machine entered the gravity field of Alpha Centauri and circled in a vast parabola. Then came the day when Ted removed the film from the cameras and developed it.

Delicately and carefully he worked on the film in total darkness. He held back his impatience, telling himself that ten years had passed and that a few more moments would be beneficial regardless of how he felt. He developed the films fully and fixed them completely, and taking no chances, he washed them thoroughly in complete darkness.

Then he put on the lights and looked.

There was no streak on any film. Stars at a distance would remain as points while planets at planetary distances would produce streaks as the ship crossed a long base line. But there were no streaks on the film, only bright pinpointed stars.

A week he worked and twice he circled

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Alpha Centauri hoping to locate a planet. Pictures he took of the double star—pictures and spectrographs and a horde of other data. But of planets Alpha Centauri was sterile, and with little to show for his trip in the way of planets, Ted Murray headed for Sol. Nothing he had was of any value save the pictures of the double star. Spectrographs and other shots could better be made from the Lunar Observatory. All that Ted Murray could do, that couldn't be done from Luna, was to determine the planets of Alpha. Those they could not see—and he laughed bitterly—for there were none.

That they could not have seen them had Alpha Centauri been teeming with planets made little difference to Ted. He had made a futile swing around Alpha Centauri and now he was heading for home.

Of course, he was the first man to see another star from close by, but he wanted to bring something home for Joseph Farnsworth to goggle at. In the eyes of the world he might have been a hero, but the one he wanted to lord over was Farnsworth, and nothing he had done was of sufficient value to impress him.

Bitterly, he entered the quick-freeze box and snapped the switch, wincing against the expected chill-pain.

Again, it seemed like a mere wink of the eyes. Sol blazed before him and a minute double planet that Ted knew to be Earth and Luna by appearance and distance from the sun.

It took but a moment to set his course, and then came the days of waiting during which he alternately tried to guess how earth had changed in twenty years.

Bitterly he resented the fact that he had not returned with a tale of habitable planets, possibly habited by a strange and alien race.

He kept wondering about Diane. That was going to be a shock, he thought. What would she be like?

Then another item demanded his attention. He set up his space radar but found none of the rotating rockets they were going to send forth to carry fuel for his landing. Not that he needed it since he had made no planet-landing in that other system, but having a reserve would have made him feel more comfortable. So instead of making a direct landing with the added fuel, Ted Murday started to spiral the earth in long, lazy ellipses.

HE WAS detected as he first grazed the atmosphere and he was followed until successive touches with deeper and deeper layers of air had slowed him to a comfortable landing velocity. Then he brazenly balanced his rocket down on its tail and landed on the salt flats.

The ground was warm below, hot close by as he opened the spacelock door that had been closed against the void of interstellar space for twenty years.

Yet hot as the temperature was, it did not prevent a number of persons from running at top speed across the flats to greet him.

He dropped to the ground and faced the foremost welcomer—a girl.

"Diane! You're— It must be you?"

"Ted, you came back?" she asked. Her face showed she was puzzled.

"Of course!"

"You didn't go?"

"What is this?" he demanded. "Of course I went. I was there—and there aren't any planets. But you must be—"

"I'm a bit disappointed," she told him. "But none the less glad to see you back. Don't go again, Ted. Tell me, what happened? Did something fail?"

"No."

"Yes," said Joseph Farnsworth, puffing as he came up. "Murray failed. Now, young man, you realize the folly."

"I did not fail," yelled Murray angrily.

"You can't tell me that you've crossed four light years in a matter of months?"

"Months?" yelled Murray. "Months?"

"Thirteen months to the day, almost," replied Diane.

"Thirteen months? But this is impossible!"

"You bet it is," snorted Farnsworth. "What are you trying to do, pull a fast one? I told you you were a phony, Murray, and this proves it."

"But there's some explanation," said Murray. "Got to be. I was there and I took pictures."

"Well, one year and one month have passed. You try and prove otherwise."

Ted Murray re-entered the ship and came out with exposed photographic film.

"There," he said, "is Alpha Centauri from less than two hundred million miles, taken from one edge of the binary so as to get both suns on the plate."

"Phonies, like yourself," grunted Farnsworth.

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"I am not!"

"Then prove it!" snapped Farnsworth. He took Diane by the arm and led her away. Ted tried to follow but was stopped by an encircling ring of reporters.

"Why did you come back?" they asked.

"I've been there," he replied stoutly.

"In thirteen months?" they asked him scornfully.

And that began it. There was no way to prove by the ship that he had been gone long enough to cover four light years of space. The control-batteries of radio-isotopic materials capable of lasting fifty years were not discharged more than thirteen months worth.

The "perpetual" clock, powered by a bit of radioactive material was taken apart and measured. The material had not even begun to approach its half-life.

Through it all, Murray maintained that he had been there. And through it all came the constant drumming of accredited scientists that nothing could exceed the speed of light.

MURRAY was forced to accept the evidence; he had been gone only thirteen months. The automatic camera in the ship that had been set to take pictures every couple of months—to create a sequence showing a rapid approach to Alpha Centauri—had exposed but seven films, three of them on the way, showing a recognizable picture of a double sun only on the third. The fourth was of unrecognizable sky. The fifth and sixth were recognizable as being taken either from Alpha—or from Earth itself—or from the direction one would take in returning from Alpha Centauri. The seventh showed Sol.

"Fakes," was the opinion.

"Then how did I manage it?" demanded Murray. "That camera was sealed!"

"You tell us," sneered the press and the radio and the scientists. It was impossible, they said, everybody said, to get to Alpha Centauri and return in a matter of thirteen months.

And Ted's letters of plea for a month came back unopened, wrapped in a folder. Across the face was written:

You went out to prove the value of that idiotic journey. Bring one fact home and you will be welcome. One fact, that is, beside the known and accepted fact that you are a liar, a cheat, and a sensationalist!

Farnsworth.

The world sought a legal recourse, but none was handy. So the world at large scoffed at Ted Murray and cast him from society. And the world set up the star ship to make the try again—this time, they said, with someone honest!

THE evening before the second flight to Alpha Centauri, was to be made, Ted Murray sat alone on a small boulder at the edge of the salt flats and watched the lights play on the star ship in the distance. He was completely beaten and baffled. Disbelieved and disowned and alone, he was doubtful of his own evidence.

It was possible, he had been given to understand by the psychiatrist that talked to him by the hour, that a man will prepare false evidence to support an erroneous theory and not remember having falsified the evidence. He had been most thoroughly examined and the psychiatrist had stated that he was neither paranoid nor psychopathic liar—now. The psychiatrist shrugged, when asked about the past, and said that he had no way of knowing.

Hour after hour he sat, and the ring of cigarette butts increased. Hour after hour he sat pondering as he had pondered before, day after day.

All that kept him going was the most certain knowledge that the next try at Alpha Centauri would produce the same result and he then would be vindicated. After another year of bearing the disgrace he did not earn, he would be vindicated but the great bulk of credit would go to the man who made the proving try, for he would have the public acclaim when he returned. Ted Murray would be forgotten save for a formal apology.

He hurled the cigarette away angrily and then relaxed again because there was nothing he could do. He knew of no place he could vent righteous anger without having it rebound tenfold. All he could do was bear up under it until the truth were known, and hope that Diane would not accept one of the many men that her father must be forcing upon her. Again he shrugged. He had chosen the "away" course once before. Doubtless she might question the depth of his affection, even though it seemed as though he had braved a ridiculous and dangerous ordeal to return to her.

ONLY time would tell. He had no way of knowing what Diane Farnsworth thought.

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He lighted another cigarette slowly and threw it down after one tasteless puff. If he only could have had one real witness—or Joseph Farnsworth's consent for Diane to have gone with him! He had been entitled to the chance of proving his own story all by himself!

He had been to Alpha Centauri. He knew it! But how and why all this had occurred was the stickler. If he could explain one simple physical phenomenon that would permit matter to exceed the speed of light then his story would be accepted.

He heard the crunch of a foot on the salt flats near him and he arose, preparing to move on. No use being told. He'd move first and save trouble.

"No, Ted! Wait!"

"Diane?"

"Yes. Ted, tell me one thing. Truthfully. Were you really at Alpha?"

"So help me God I was!"

"I believe you, Ted. Then something must be wrong with the astro-mathematics."

He nodded dully. "But what?" he asked in a flat, hopeless tone.

"Ted, I'm none too bright about such subjects. Just what is the argument against exceeding the speed of light?"

Ted smiled grimly, took a deep breath and said: "As the velocity of matter increases, so its mass increases. It is a complex formula, for the mass-increase is inconsiderable up to a high fraction of the speed of light. But as the speed of light is reached, the mass of the matter increases to infinity. Matter traveling at the speed of light has infinite mass—an obvious impossibility."

"Why does the mass increase?" asked Diane.

"Matter and energy are interchangeable according to the well-proved Einstein Equation."

"Proved?" she asked.

"In any of the accelerating devices for atomic particles, it has been shown that as their velocity increases, their mass increases according to the formula. That's known."

"But exactly why?"

He smiled again. "I've just told you. The velocity of matter is a measure of the energy installed in it. In order to increase the velocity of a particle or a spacecraft, the amount of energy must be introduced equivalent to the increase of mass according to the mass-equation. Therefore to increase the velocity of a spacecraft to the speed of light, an infinite amount of energy must be introduced so as to raise its mass to infinity. Impossible."

"But is it?" she persisted.

"Must not be," he said slowly. "But time will tell. They're sending that ship off again tomorrow. In another year we'll all know."

"Unless," she said very slowly, "the ship is wrecked. Then you'll truly be scoffed to death, Ted."

He nodded. "In thirteen months if the ship is wrecked, we'll all go through this again."

"You have faith in yourself," she said. "If you were going again, would you use the quick-freeze chamber?"

"No," he said. "Not until I knew the truth."

"Ted," she said quietly, "I'll go with you."

He looked across the salt flats at the ship. The searchlights were dying, now. All was ready for the morning take-off.

"Like carving your initials on the bottom gold-brick at Fort Knox," he said bitterly.

"Not if you had a decoy," she said pointedly.

"Decoy?" he echoed dully.

"Watch," she said. "And use your brains."

It was surprisingly easy. The guards expected no trouble and they were well spread out. Diane went to the nearer guard and brazenly flirted with him. The other guards smiled tolerantly and made business necessary on the far side of the ship.

From a safe distance in the dark, Ted heard Diane asking about the insides of the rocket, and heard the guard answer proudly. Diane wanted to see it, and she insisted invitingly. A moment later she was walking towards the open spacelock with the guard's hand clasped in her own. He moved with lagging steps at first, but he became more eager as they went until they went up the ramp with his arm about her slender waist.

He was kissing Diane in the spacelock when Ted Murray came up behind him, wrenched his shoulder around, and came up with a fist as the guard turned.

He started to drag the guard out but Diane stopped him. "He's a good witness," she said. "And besides—the flareback."

Ted nodded. "Incinerate him, wouldn't it?"

The spacelock door started to close as the

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other guards became aware that something was wrong. The closing door shut off their shouts and deflected a snapped shot fired as warning.

THEN the guards were running madly away because they heard the rumble of the fuel pumps in the bottom step of the rocket.

Then they were up and gone—and on their way. As the first step fired off the guard came awake.

"What goes?" he asked painfully.

"We're in space," said Murray. "And in space we stay until I find the answer to this problem."

"Ah!" said the guard, reaching for his empty holster.

His hand came away slowly, and he looked up at Murray quizzically.

"You are neatly trapped," said Murray. "Be good and you'll fare much better. Harm me and you'll never get home."

"But what's the big idea?"

"We are—somehow—going to do the impossible and exceed the speed of light," said Murray. "And we're going to watch—and we're going to prove it to the world that I am neither liar nor cheat. Understand?"

"You're crazy like they all said," snapped the guard.

"Maybe," said Murray with a laugh. "And you are in the hands of a madman, then, who holds your life easily. Maybe you'll be nice to me, huh?"

"You win. What do I do next?"

"Nothing," said Murray. "But watch!"

It was man's fastest machine, and yet it went at a cosmic crawl. The days passed as the Solar System and Sol himself receeded. Days and days added into weeks, and they watched and made notes. Sol changed from a bright disc to a painfully inadequate sun and then to a small point in the sky. More days passed. . . .

"Those stars aren't as they were before," said Murray, looking forward.

"What have they done?" asked Diane.

"They've moved—somehow."

And in more days it was certain. Before them the stars changed in color, increased into the blue while those in the rear became ruddy. As they went onward, they left those stars further behind. Now the course of the ship was crossing their rays of light at a velocity that made them appear to come from a different angle. Alpha Centauri blazed a violet-white as the heavens crawled forward.

"We're exceeding the speed of light," said Murray. The stars behind now appear ahead because we are crossing their light so fast that we are catching up with the rays."

"But how and why?" asked the guard. "I pass, Murray. You're not crazy, and I am here to prove it."

"As we left the Solar System, our velocity increased in some inexplicable manner," said Murray. "Let's see if we can figure out some field-theory."

"Field theory?" asked Diane.

"Uh-huh," replied Murray absently. "Just what kind of field are we in now—or what kind of field did we leave?"

"What is mass?" asked Diane.

MURRAY paused. Then he spoke slowly and clearly.

"Mass is—ah—mass is a property of matter," he replied. Then he shouted. "I've got it! An electron moving in a wire creates a magnetic field. A magnetic field will cause an electron to move along a wire. The earth moving in the gravitational field of the sun causes the formation of a magnetic field around the earth. Magnetism, mass, and gravity are all too little known—but suppose that mass is an 'induced' property. That matter moving in the gravitational field of other gross matter takes on mass."

"So?"

"Then as we leave the gravitational field of Sol our mass drops—and the energy we have applied to the ship goes undiminished. Then for a given amount of energy, as we decrease the mass of the spaceship the energy has less work to do, so to speak. It does take less energy to get a lesser mass into motion, you know."

"But Einstein's Mass-Velocity formula?" asked Diane.

"Holds only in the gravitic field of a stellar body. You see, Diane, until I drove clear out of the solar system where the gravitational field of Sol is considerably diminished no one has ever had a chance to check the mass-increase proposition in completely free space!"

Murray kissed her enthusiastically. "And we can tell your father that instead of squandering billions on a will-o'-the-wisp we have given Sol the opportunity of colonizing the entire universe! That ought to be big enough to impress him!"

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the microscopic GIANTS

By PAUL ERNST

Two rash humans invade the strange underground domain of death-dealing pygmies who live in the depths of solid rock!

IT HAPPENED toward the end of the Great War, which was an indirect cause. You'll find mention of it in the official records filed at Washington. Curious reading, some of those records! Among them are accounts of incidents so bizarre—freak accidents and odd discoveries fringing war activities—that the filing clerks must have raised their eyebrows skeptically before they buried them in steel cabinets, to remain unread for the rest of time.

But this particular one will never be buried in oblivion for me. Because I was on the spot when it happened, and I was the one who sent in the report.

Copper!

A war-worn world was famished for it. The thunder of guns, from the Arctic to the Antarctic and from the Pacific to the Atlantic and back again, drummed for it. Equipment behind the lines demanded it. Statesmen lied for it and national bankers ran up bills that would never be paid to get it.

Copper, copper, copper!

Every obscure mine in the world was worked to capacity. Men risked their lives to salvage fragments from battlefields a thousand miles long. And still not enough copper was available.

Up in the Lake Superior region we had gone down thirty-one thousand feet for it. Then, in answer to the enormous prices being paid for copper, we sank a shaft to forty thousand five hundred feet, where we struck a vein of almost pure ore. And it was shortly after this that my assistant, a young mining engineer named Belmont, came into my office, his eyes afire with the light of discovery.

"We've uncovered the greatest archaeological find since the days of the Rosetta Stone!" he announced bluntly. "Down in the new low level. I want to phone the Smithsonian Institute at once. There may be a war on, but the professors will forget all about war when they see this!"

JIM BELMONT was apt to be overenthusiastic. Under thirty, a tall, good-looking chap with light blue eyes looking lighter than they really were in a tanned, lean face, he sometimes overshot his mark by leaping before he looked.

"Wait a minute!" I said. "What have you found? Prehistoric bones? Some new kind of fossil monster?"

"Not bones," said Belmont, fidgeting toward the control board that dialed our private number to Washington on the radio telephone. "Footprints, Frayter. Fossil footsteps."

"You mean men's footprints?" I demanded, frowning. The rock formation at

SOME stories are forgotten almost as soon as they are printed. Others stand the test of time.

Because "The Microscopic Giants," by Paul Ernst, has stood this test, it has been nominated for SCIENTIFICTION'S HALL OF FAME and is reprinted here.

In each issue we will honor one of the most outstanding fantasy classics of all time as selected by our readers.

We hope in this way to bring a new permanence to the science fiction gems of yesterday and to perform a real service to the science fiction devotees of today and tomorrow.

Nominate your own favorites! Send a letter or postcard to The Editor, STARTLING STORIES, 10 East 40th St., New York 16, N. Y. All suggestions are more than welcome!

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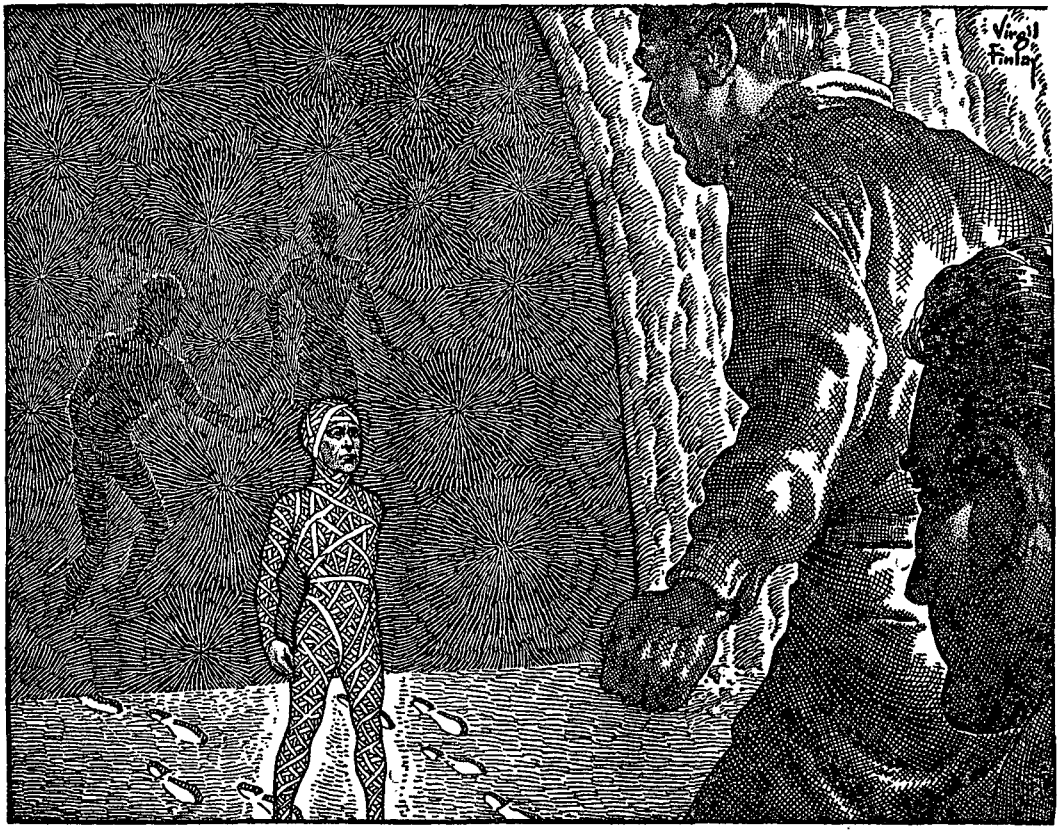

"There's another of them!" Belmont exclaimed. "We're mad, Frank—we must be!"

the forty-thousand-foot level was age-old. The Pleistocene era had not occurred when those rocks were formed. "Impossible."

"But I tell you they're down there! Footprints preserved in the solid rock. Men's footprints! They antedate anything ever thought of in the age of Man."

Belmont drew a deep breath.

"And more than that," he almost whispered. "They are prints of shod men, Frank! The men who made those prints, millions of years ago, wore shoes. We've stumbled on traces of a civilization that existed long, long before man was supposed to have evolved on this earth at all!"

His whisper reverberated like a shout, such was its great import. But I still couldn't believe it. Prints of men—at the forty-thousand-foot level—and prints of shod feet at that!

"If they're prints of feet with shoes on them," I said, "they might be simply prints of our own workmen's boots. If the Smithsonian men got up here and found that a laugh would go up that would ruin us."

"No, no," said Belmont. "That's impossible. You see, these prints are those of *little* men. I hadn't told you before, had I? I guess I'm pretty excited. The men who made these prints were small—hardly more than two feet high, if the size of their feet can be taken as a true gauge. The prints are hardly more than three inches long."

"Where did you happen to see them?" I asked.

"Near the concrete we poured to fill in the rift we uncovered at the far end of the level."

"Some of the workmen may have been playing a trick."

"Your confounded skepticism!" Belmont cried. "Tricks! Perhaps they're prints of our own men! Didn't I tell you the prints were preserved in *solid rock?* Do you think a workman would take the trouble to carve, most artistically, a dozen footprints three inches long in solid rock? Or that—if we had any men with feet that small—their feet would sink into the rock for a half inch or more? I tell you these are fossil prints, made millions of years ago when that rock

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was mud, and preserved when the rock hardened."

"And I tell you," I replied a little hotly, "that it's all impossible. Because I supervised the pouring of that concrete, and I would have noticed if there were prints."

"Suppose you come down and look," said Belmont. "After all, that's the one sure way of finding out if what I say is true."

I reached for my hat. Seeing for myself was the one way of finding out if Belmont had gone off half-cocked again.

It takes a long time to go down forty thousand feet. We hadn't attempted to speed up the drop too much; at such great depths there are abnormalties of pressure and temperature to which the human machine takes time to become accustomed.

By the time we'd reached the new low level I'd persuaded myself that Belmont must surely be mad. But having come this far I went through with it, of course.

Fossil prints of men who could not have been more than two feet high, shod in civilized fashion, preserved in rock at the forty-thousand-foot level! It was ridiculous.

We got near the concrete fill at the end of the tunnel, and I pushed the problem of prints out of my mind for a moment while I examined its blank face. Rearing that slanting concrete wall had presented some peculiar problems.

AS WE had bored in, ever farther under the thick skin of Mother Earth, we had come to a rock formation that had no right to exist there at all. It was a layer of soft, mushy stuff, with gaping cracks in it, slanting down somewhere toward the bowels of the earth. Like a soft strip of marrow in hard bone, it lay between dense, compressed masses of solid rock. And we had put ten feet of concrete over its face to avoid cave-ins.

Concrete is funny stuff. It acts differently in different pressures and temperatures. The concrete we'd poured here, where atmospheric pressure made a man gasp and the temperature was above a hundred and eighteen in spite of cooling systems, hadn't acted at all like any I'd ever seen before. It hadn't seemed to harden as well as it should, and it still rayed out perceptible, self-generated heat in the pressure surrounding it. But it seemed to be serving its purpose, all right, though it was as soft as cheese compared to the rock around it.

"Here!" said Belmont, pointing down in the bright light of the raw electric bulbs stringing along the level. "Look!"

I looked—and got a shock that I can still feel. A half inch or so deep in the rock floor of the level at the base of the concrete retaining wall, there were footprints. The oddest, tiniest things imaginable!

Jim Belmont had said they were three inches long. If anything he had overstated their size. I don't think some of them were more than two and a half inches long! And they were the prints of shod feet, undeniably. Perfect soles and heels, much like those of shoes we wear, were perceptible.

I stared at the prints with disbelief for a moment, even though my own eyes gave proof of their presence. And I felt an icy finger trace its way up my spine.

I had spent hours at this very spot while the concrete fill was made over the face of the down-slanting rift of much rock. And I hadn't seen the little prints then. Yet here they were, a dozen of them made by feet of at least three varying sizes. How had I missed seeing them before?

"Prints made millions of years ago," Belmont whispered ecstatically. "Preserved when the mud hardened to rock—to be discovered here! Proof of a civilization on earth before man was thought to have been born . . . For Heaven's sake! Look at that concrete!"

I stared along the line of his pointing finger, and saw another queer thing. Queer? It was impossible!

The concrete retaining wall seemed slightly milkly, and not quite opaque! Like a great block of frosted glass, into which the eye could see for a few inches before vision was lost.

And then, again, the icy finger touched my spine. This time so plainly that I shuddered a little in spite of the heat.

For a moment I had thought to see movement in the concrete! A vague, luminous swirl that was gone before I had fairly seen it. Or had I seen it? Was imagination, plus the presence of these eerie footprints, working overtime?

"Transparent concrete," said Belmont. "There's one for the book. Silicon in greater than normal amounts in the sand we used? Some trick of pressure? But it doesn't matter. The prints are more important. Shall we phone the Institute, Frank?"

For a moment I didn't answer. I was

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observing one more odd thing.

The footprints went in only two directions. They led out from the concrete wall, and led back to it again. And I could still swear they hadn't been there up to three days before, when I had examined the concrete fill most recently.

But of course they must have been there—for a million years or more!

"Let's wait a while on it," I heard myself say. "The prints won't vanish. They're in solid rock."

"But why wait?"

I stared at Belmont, and I saw his eyes widen at something in my face.

"There's something more than peculiar about those prints!" I said. "Fossil footsteps of men two feet high are fantastic enough. But there's something more fantastic than that! See the way they point from the concrete, and then back to it again? As if whatever made them had come out of the concrete, and had looked around for a few minutes, and then had gone back into the concrete again!"

IT WAS Belmon't turn to look at me as if suspecting a lack of sanity. Then he laughed.

"The prints were here a long, long time before the concrete was ever poured, Frank. They just happened to be pointing in the directions they do. All right, we'll wait on the Smithsonian Institute notifications." He stopped and exclaimed aloud, gaze on the rock floor.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"An illustration of how you could have overlooked the prints when you were supervising the fill," he said, grinning. "When I was down here last, a few hours ago, I counted an even twelve prints. Now, over here where I'd have sworn there were no prints, I see four more, made by still another pair of feet back before the dawn of history. It's funny how unobservant the eye can be."

"Yes," I said slowly. "It's very—funny."

For the rest of the day the drive to get more ore out of the ground, ever more copper for the guns and war instruments, drove the thought of the prints to the back of my mind. But back there the thought persisted.

Tiny men, wearing civilized-looking boots, existing long, long ago! What could they have looked like? The prints, marvelously like those of our own shod feet, suggested that they must have been perfect little humans, like our midgets. What business could they have been about when they left those traces of their existence in mud marshes millions of years ago. . . .

Yes, of course, millions of years ago! Several times I had to rein in vague and impossible impressions with those words. But some deep instinct refused to be reined.

And then Carson, my foreman, came to me when the last of the men had emerged from the shafts.

Carson was old; all the young men save highly trained ones like Belmont and myself, who were more valuable in peace zones, were at the various war fronts. He was nearly seventy, and cool and level-headed. It was unusual to see a frown on his face such as was there when he walked up to me.

"Mr. Frayter," he said, "I'm afraid we'll have trouble with the men."

"Higher wages?" I said. "What they need is more patriotism."

"They're not kicking about wages," Carson said. "It's a lot different than that. Steve Boland, he started it."

He spat tobacco juice at a nailhead.

"Steve works on the new low level, you know. Near the concrete fill. And he's been passing crazy talk among the men. He says he can see into the concrete a little way—"

"That's right," I interrupted him. "I was down there this afternoon, and for some curious reason the stuff is a little transparent. Doubtless we could investigate and find out what causes the phenomenon. But it isn't worth taking the time for."

"Maybe it would be worth it," replied Carson quietly. "If it would stop Steve's talk, it might save a shutdown."

"What is Steve saying?"

"He says he saw a man in the concrete, two hours ago. A little man."

I stared at Carson.

"I know he's crazy," the old man went on. "But he's got the rest halfway believing it. He says he saw a man about a foot and a half high, looking at him out of the concrete. The man was dressed in strips of some shiny stuff that made him look like he had a metal shell on. He looked at Steve for maybe a minute, then turned and walked back through the concrete, like it was nothing but thick air. Steve followed him for a foot or so and then was unable to see him any more."

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I smiled at Carson while sweat suddenly formed under my arms and trickled down my sides.

"Send Steve to me," I said. "I'll let him tell me the story too. Meanwhile, kill the story among the men."

Carson sighed.

"It's going to be pretty hard to kill, Mr. Frayter. You see, there's footprints down there. Little footprints that might be made by what Steve claimed he saw."

"You think a man eighteen inches high could sink into solid rock for half an inch—" I began. Then I stopped. But it was already too late.

"Oh, you've seen them too!" said Carson, with the glint of something besides worry in his eyes.

THEN I told him of how and when the prints had been made.

"I'll send Steve to you," was all he said, avoiding my eyes.

Steve Bland was a hulking, powerful man of fifty. He was not one of my best men, but as far as I knew he had no record of being either unduly superstitious or a liar.

He repeated to me the story Carson had quoted him as telling. I tried to kill the fear I saw peering out of his eyes.

"You saw those prints, made long ago, and then you imagined you saw what had made them," I argued. "Use your head, man. Do you think anything could live and move around in concrete?"

"I don't think nothing about nothing, Mr. Frayter," he said doggedly. "I saw what I saw. A little man, dressed in some shiny stuff, in the concerte. And those footprints weren't made a long time ago. They were made in the last few days!"

I couldn't do anything with him. He was terrified, under his laborious show of self-control.

"I'm leaving, Mr. Frayter. Unless you let me work in an upper level. I won't go down there any more."

After he had left my office shack, I sent for Belmont.

"This may get serious," I told him, after revealing what I'd heard. "We've got to stop this story right now."

He laughed. "Of all the crazy stuff! But you're right. We ought to stop it. What would be the best way?"

"We'll pull the night shift out of there," I said, "and we'll spend the night watching the concrete. Tell all the men in advance. Then when we come up in the morning, we can see if they'll accept our word of honor that nothing happened."

Belmont grinned and nodded.

"Take a gun," I added, staring at a spot over his head.

"What on earth for?"

"Why not?" I evaded. "They don't weigh much. We might as well carry one apiece in our belts."

His laugh stung me as he went to give orders to the crew usually working at night in the forty-thousand-foot level.

We started on the long trip down, alone.

There is no day or night underground. Yet somehow, as Belmont and I crouched in the low level we could know that it was not day. We could sense that deep night held the world outside; midnight darkness in which nothing was abroad save the faint wind rattling the leaves of the trees.

We sat on the rock fragments, with our backs against the wall, staring at the concrete fill till our eyes ached in the raw electric light. We left like fools, and said so to each other. And yet—

"Steve has some circumstantial evidence to make his insane yarn sound credible," I said. "The way we overlooked those footprints in the rock till recently makes it look as if they'd been freshly formed. You observed a few more this afternoon than you'd noticed before. And this ridiculous concrete is a shade transparent, as though some action or movement within it had changed its character slightly."

Belmont grimaced toward the concrete.

"If I'd know the report about the footprints was going to turn us all into crazy men," he grumbled, "I'd have kept my mouth shut—"

His voice cracked off abruptly. I saw the grin freeze on his lips; saw him swallow convulsively.

"Look!" he whispered, pointing toward the center of the eight-by-thirty-foot wall.

I stared, but could see nothing unusual about the wall. That is, nothing but the fact we'd observed before; you could look into the thing for a few inches before vision was lost.

"What is it?" I snapped, stirred by the expression on his face.

He sighed, and shook his head.

"Nothing, I guess. I thought for a minute I saw something in the wall. A sort of mov-

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'ing bright spot. But I guess it's only another example of the kind of imagination that got Steve Boland—"

AGAIN he stopped abruptly. And this time he got unsteadily to his feet.

"No, it's not imagination! Look, Frank! If you can't see it, then I'm going crazy!"

I stared again. And this time I could swear I saw something too.

Deep in the ten-foot-thick retaining wall, a dim, luminous spot seemed to be growing. As though some phosphorescent growth were slowly mushrooming in there.

"You see it too?" he breathed.

"I see it too," I whispered.

"Thank God for that! Then I'm sane or we're both mad. What's happening inside that stuff? It's getting brighter, and larger—" His fingers clamped over my arm. "Look! Look!"

But there was no need for him to tell me to look. I was staring already with starting eyes, while my heart began to hammer in my chest like a sledge.

As the faint, luminous spot in the concrete grew larger it also took recognizable form. And the form that appeared in the depths of the stuff was that of a human!

Human? Well, yes, if you can think of a thing no bigger than an eighteen-inch doll as being human.

A mannikin a foot and a half high, embedded in the concrete! But not embedded—for it was moving! Toward us!

In astounded silence, Belmont and I stared. It didn't occur to us then to be afraid. Nothing occurred to us save indescribable wonder at the impossible vision we saw.

I can close my eyes and see the thing now: a manlike little figure walking toward us through solid concrete. It bent forward as though shouldering a way against a sluggish tide, or a heavy wind; it moved as a deep-sea diver might move in clogging water. But that was all the resistance the concrete seemed to offer to it, that sluggish impediment to its forward movement.

Behind it there was a faint swirl of luminosity, like phosphorescent water moving in the trail of a tiny boat. And the luminosity surrounded the thing like an aura.

And now we could see its face, and I heard Belmont's whispered exclamation. For the face was as human as ours, with a straight nose, a firm, well-shaped mouth, and eyes glinting with intelligence.

With intelligence—and something else!

There was something deadly about those eyes peering at us through the misty concrete. Something that would have sent our hands leaping for our guns had not the thing been so little. You can't physically fear a doll only a foot and a half high.

"What on earth is it—and how can it move through solid concrete?" breathed Belmont.

I couldn't even guess the answer. But I had a theory that sprang full grown into my mind at the first sight of the little figure. It was all I had to offer in the way of explanation later, and I gave it to Belmont for what it was worth at the time.

"We must be looking at a hitherto unsuspected freak of evolution," I said, instinctively talking in a whisper. "It must be that millions of years ago the human race split. Some of it stayed on top of the ground; some of it went into deep caves for shelter. As thousands of years passed, the underearth beings went ever deeper as new rifts leading downward were discovered. But far down in the earth is terrific pressure, and heat. Through the ages their bodies adapted themselves. They compacted—perhaps in their very atomic structure.

"Now the density of their substance, and its altered atomic character, allows them to move through stuff that is solid to us. Like the concrete and the mush rock behind it, which is softer than the terrifically compressed stone around it."

"But the thing has eyes," murmured Belmont. "Anything living for generations underground would be blind."

"Animals, yes. But this is human; at least it has human intelligence. It has undoubtedly carried light with it."

THE LITTLE mannikin was within a few inches of the surface of the wall now. It stood there, staring out at us as intently as we stared in at it. And I could see that Steve Boland had added no imaginative detail in his description of what he had seen.

The tiny thing was dressed in some sort of shiny stuff, like metal, that crisscrossed it in strips. It reminded me of something, and finally I got it. Our early airmen, trying for altitude records high in the stratosphere, had laced their bodies with heavy canvas strips to keep them from disrupting outward

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in the lessened pressure of the heights. The metallic-looking strips lacing this little body looked like those.

"It must be that the thing comes from depths that make this forty-thousand-foot level seem high and rarefied," I whispered to Belmont. "Hundreds of thousands of feet, perhaps. They've heard us working at the ore, and have come far up here to see what was happening.

"But to go through solid concrete—" muttered Belmont, dazed.

"That would be due to the way the atoms of their substance have been compressed and altered. They might be like the stuff on Sirius' companion, where substance weighs a ton to the cubic inch. That would allow the atoms of their bodies to slide through far-spaced atoms of ordinary stuff, as lead shot could pour through a wide-meshed screen. . . .

Belmont was so silent that I stared at him. He was paying no attention to me, probably hadn't even heard me. His eyes were wild and wide.

"There's another of them. And another! Frank—we're mad. We must be."

Two more luminous swirls had appeared in the depths of the concrete. Two more tiny little human figures slowly appeared as, breasting forward like deep-sea divers against solid water, they plodded toward the face of the wall.

And now three mannikins, laced in with silvery-looking metal strips, stared at us through several inches of the milky appearing concrete. Belmont clutched my arm again.

"Their eyes!" he whispered. "They certainly don't like us, Frank! I'm glad they're like things you see under a low powered microscope instead of man-sized or bigger!"

Their eyes were most impressive—and threatening. They were like human eyes, and yet unlike them. There was a lack of something in them. Perhaps of the thing we call, for want of a more definite term, Soul. But they were as expressive as the eyes of intelligent children.

I read curiosity in them as intense as that which filled Belmont and me. But over and above the curiosity there was—menace.

Cold anger shone from the soulless eyes. Chill outrage, such as might shine from the eyes of a man whose home has been invaded. The little men palpably considered us trespassers in these depths, and were glacially infuriated by our presence.

And then both Belmont and I gasped aloud. For one of the little men had thrust his hands forward, and hands and arms had protruded from the wall, like the hands of a person groping a way out of a thick mist. Then the tiny body followed it. And as if at a signal, the other two little men moved forward out of the wall too.

The three metal-laced mannikins stood in the open air of the tunnel, with their backs to the wall that had offered no more resistance to their bodies than cheese offers to sharp steel. And behind them there were no holes where they had stepped from. The face of the concrete was unbroken.

The atomic theory must be correct, I thought. The compacted atoms of which they were composed slid through the stellar spaces between ordinary atoms, leaving them undisturbed.

But only a small part of my mind concerned itself with this. Nine-tenths of it was absorbed by a growing, indefinable fear. For now the three little men were walking slowly toward us. And in every line of their tiny bodies was a threat.

BELMONT looked at me. Our hands went uncertainly toward our revolvers. But we did not draw them. You don't shoot at children, and the diminutive size of the three figures still made us consider them much as harmless children, though in the back of my mind, at least, if not in Belmont's, the indefinable fear was spreading.

The three stopped about a yard from us. Belmont was standing, and I was still seated, almost in a paralysis of wonder, on my rock fragment. They looked far up at Belmont and almost as far up at me. Three little things that didn't even come up to our knees!

And then Belmont uttered a hoarse cry and dragged out his gun at last. For one of the three slid his tiny hand into the metal lacing of his body and brought it out with a sort of rod in it about the size of a thick pin, half an inch long. And there was something about the look in the mannikin's eyes that brought a rush of frank fear to our hearts at last, though we couldn't even guess at the nature of the infinitesimal weapon he held.

The mannikin pointed the tiny rod at Belmont, and Belmont shot. I didn't blame him. I had my own gun out and trained on the other two. After all, we knew nothing of

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the nature of these fantastic creatures who had come up from unguessable depths below. We couldn't even approximate the amount of harm they might do, but their eyes told us they'd do whatever they could to hurt us.

An exclamation ripped from my lips as the roar of the shot thundered down the tunnel.

The bullet had hit the little figure. It couldn't have helped but hit it; Belmont's gun was within a yard of it, and he'd aimed point-blank.

But not a mark appeared on the mannikin, and he stood there apparently unhurt!

Belmont fired again, and to his shot I added my own. The bullets did the little men no damage at all.

"The slugs are going right through the things!" yelled Belmont, pointing.

Behind the mannikins, long scars in the rock floor told where the lead had ricocheted. But I shook my head in a more profound wonder than that of Belmont's.

"The bullets aren't going through them! They're going through the bullets! The stuff they're made of is denser than lead!"

The little man with the tiny rod took one more step forward. And then I saw something that had been lost for the time in the face of things even more startling. I saw how the tiny tracks had been made.

As the mannikin stepped forward, I saw his advancing foot sink into the rock of the floor till the soles of his metallic-looking shoes were buried!

That small figure weighed so much that it sank into stone as a man would sink into ooze!

And now the miscroscopic rod flamed a little at the tip. And I heard Belmont scream—just once.

He fell, and I looked at him with a shock too great for comprehension, so that I simply stood there stupidly and saw without really feeling any emotion.

The entire right half of Belmont's chest was gone. It was only a crater—a crater that gaped out, as holes gape over spots where shells bury themselves deep and explode up and out.

There had been no sound, and no flash other than the minute speck of flame tipping the mannikin's rod. At one moment Belmont had been whole. At the next he was dead, with half his chest gone. That was all.

I heard myself screaming, and felt my gun buck in my hand as I emptied it. Then the infinitesimal rod turned my way, and I felt a slight shock and stared at my right wrist where a hand and a gun had once been.

I heard my own yells as from a great distance. I felt no pain; there are nerve shocks too great for pain-sensation. I felt only crazed, stupefied rage.

I LEAPED at the three little figures. With all my strength I swung my heavily booted foot at the one with the rod. There was death in that swing. I wanted to kill these three. I was berserk, with no thought in mind other than to rend and tear and smash. That kick would have killed an ox, I think.

It caught the little man in the middle of the back. And I screamed again and sank to the floor with the white-hot pain of broken small bones spiking my brain. That agony, less than the shock of losing a hand, I could feel all right. And in a blind haze of it I saw the little man smile bleaky and reach out his tiny hand toward Belmont, disregarding me as utterly as though I no longer existed.

And then through the fog of my agony I saw yet another wonder. The little man lifted Belmont's dead body.

With the one hand, and apparently with no more effort than I would have made to pick up a pebble, he swung the body two inches off the floor, and started toward the concrete wall with it.

I tried to follow, crawling on my knees, but one of the other little men dashed his fist against my thigh. It sank in my flesh till his arm was buried to the shoulder, and the mannikin staggered off-balance with the lack of resistance. He withdrew his arm. There was no mark in the fabric of my clothing and I could feel no puncture in my thigh.

The little man stared perplexedly at me, and then at his fist. Then he joined the other two. They were at the face of the concrete wall again.

I saw that they were beginning to look as though in distress. They were panting, and the one with the rod was pressing his hand against his chest. They looked at each other and I thought a message was passed among them.

A message of haste? I think so. For the one picked up Belmont again, and all three stepped into the concrete. I saw them forge slowly ahead through it. And I saw Bel-

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mont, at arm's length of the little man who dragged him, flatten against the smooth side of the stuff.

I think I went a little mad, then, as I understood at last just what had happened.

The little men had killed Belmont as a specimen, just as a man might kill a rare insect. They wanted to take him back to their own deep realms and study him. And they were trying to drag him through the solid concrete. It offered only normal resistance to their own compacted tons of weight, and it didn't occur to them that it would to Belmont's body.

I flung myself at the wall and clawed at it with my left hand. The body of my friend was suspended there, flattened against it as the little man within tried to make solid matter go through solid matter, ignorant of the limitations of the laws of physics as we on earth's surface know them.

They were in extreme distress now. Even in my pain and madness I could see that. Their mouths were open like the mouths of fish gasping in air. I saw one clutch the leader's arm and point urgently downward.

The leader raised his tiny rod. Once more I saw the infinitesimal flash at its tip. Then I saw a six-foot hole yawn in the concrete around Belmont's body. What was their ammunition? Tiny pellets of gas, so compressed at the depths they inhabited that it was a solid, and which expanded enormously when released at these pressures? No one will ever know—I hope!

In one last effort, the leader dragged the body of my friend into the hole in the concrete. Then, when it stubbornly refused to follow into the substance through which they could force their own bodies, they gave up. One of the three staggered and fell, sinking in the concrete as an overcome diver might sink through water to the ocean's bed. The other two picked him up and carried him. Down and away.

Down and away—down from the floor to the forty-thousand-foot level, and away from the surface of the concrete wall.

I saw the luminous trails they left in the concrete fade into indistinct swirls, and finally die. I saw my friend's form sag back from the hole in the concrete, to sink to the floor.

And then I saw nothing but the still form, and the ragged, six-foot crater that had been blown soundlessly into the solid concrete by some mysterious explosive that had come from a thing no larger than a thick pin, and less than half an inch long. . . .

THEY found me an hour later—men who had come down to see why neither Belmont nor I answered the ring of the radio phone connecting the low level with the surface.

They found me raving beside Belmont's body, and they held my arms with straps as they led me to the shaft.

They tried me for murder and sabotage. For, next day, I got away from the men long enough to sink explosive into the forty-thousand-foot level and blow it up so that none could work there again. But the verdict was not guilty in both cases.

Belmont had died and I had lost my right hand in an explosion the cause of which was unknown, the martial court decided. And I had been insane from shock when I destroyed the low level, which, even with the world famished for copper, was almost too far down to be commercially profitable anyway.

They freed me, and I wrote in my report, and some filing clerk had, no doubt, shrugged at its impossibility and put it in a steel cabinet where it will be forever ignored.

But there is one thing that cannot be ignored. That is, those mannikins, those microscopic giants, if ever they decide to return by slow stages of pressure—acclimation to the earth's surface!

Myriads of them, tiny things weighing incredible tons, forging through labyrinths composed of soft veins of rock like little deep-sea divers plodding laboriously but normally through impeding water! Beings as civilized as ourselves, if not more so, with infinitely deadly weapons, and practically invulnerable to any weapons we might try to turn against them!

Will they tunnel upward some day and decide calmly and leisurely to take possession of a world that is green and fair, instead of black and buried?

If they do, I hope it will not be in my lifetime!

Next Issue's Hall of Fame Selection: *When the Earth Lived* by Henry Kuttner

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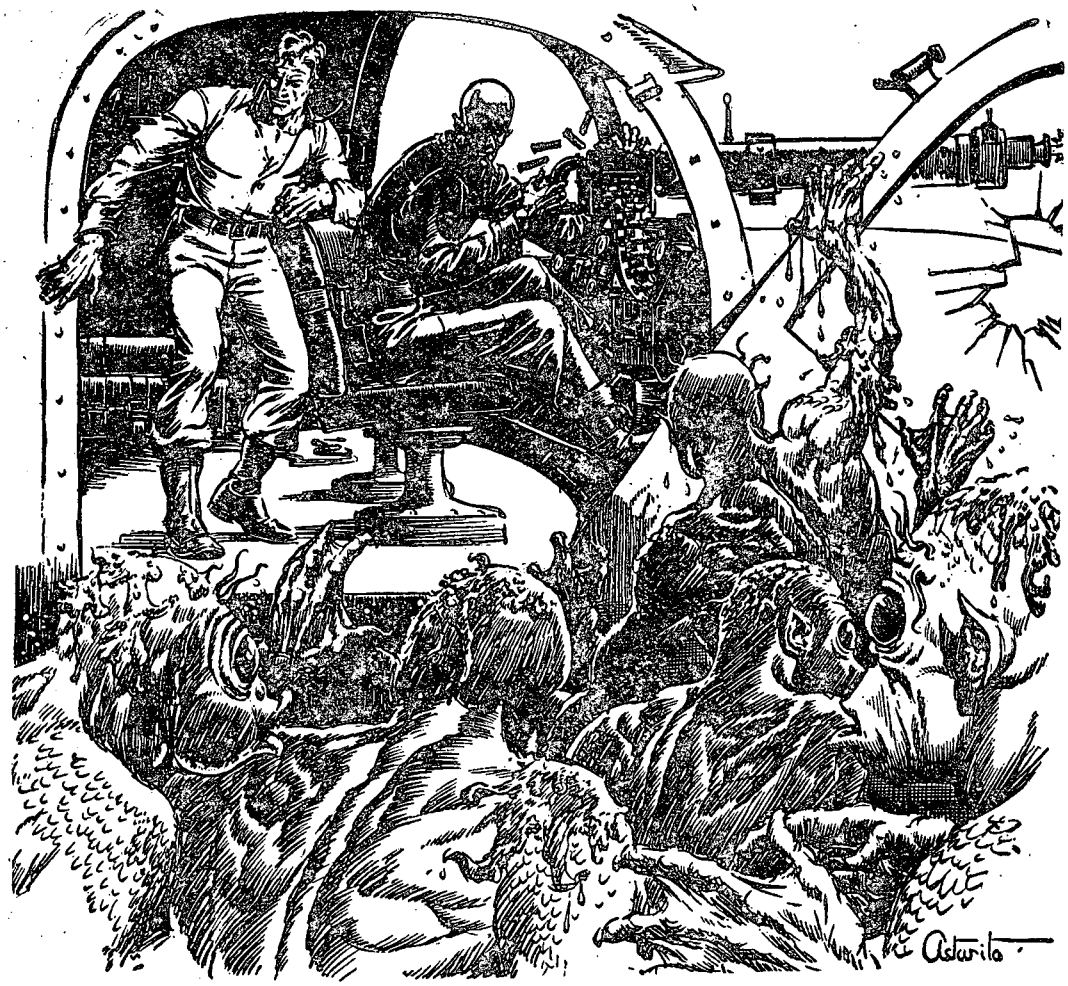

Though Salsback swung the gun without pause, the beings still came on

AFTER THE ATOM

By JOHN RUSSELL FEARN

Dr. Oswald Salsback believes that he holds in his grasp the vital secret of how to preserve peace for all time!

SINCE I have only a few hours to live, I might as well kill time by relating what actually happened. It may be believed; it may not, but as an example of irony I don't see how it could be equalled. Anyway, those beings who have condemned us may, when they read my report over, see the injustice of the sentence they have passed.

It was Dr. Oswald Salsback who started the business and I, Robert Conway, just sort of got mixed up in it. I had known Salsback as a pretty brilliant biologist way back in my college days. He had been a

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teacher of the subject at that period, and though my interests in biology and kindred subjects were at that time pretty negligible, he had such a persuasive way with him that even we "unbelievers" were forced to listen.

In his younger days Oswald Salsback was small, stoop-shouldered, thin-faced, and fast going bald. I often thought about him when I had left college and wondered how he was faring. Then to my surprise, fifteen years after leaving college I ran into him in London. In fact we collided at a street corner, and of course he ran true to type and called it one of those laws which govern probability, or something. Anyway we exchanged notes and it seemed that I had fared the worst.

At that period I was running a business of my own in radio, but it was fast going downhill before the giant new television combines. I was losing money rapidly, and I didn't like the threat of atomic war hovering on the horizon, either. It had simply killed commercial enterprise stone dead, for the small man anyway. Salsback, on the other hand, being a scientist, had minted away quite a pile of money, I gathered.

He didn't seem concerned about the impending war—*as* war, that is: he had other notions about it. I remember how I listened to him as we sat drinking coffee in a city snack bar.

He looked fifteen years older too—quite bald now, his only signs of energy being in his intensely keen blue eyes.

"Of course there's a war coming, Bob," he told me, when I had vaguely hinted at the possibility. "And since it will be atomic it may be the end of the world. On that point, however, I'm none too sure. Man has a surprising habit of surviving the mightiest of cataclysms, and I cannot see why it mightn't apply this time as well. To whatever survivors there may be I think we should hand over the secret of how to preserve peace for all time."

I raised an eyebrow at him, and I think I smiled. Evidently old age was coming on and he was filled with notions of altering the unalterable.

"Naturally you don't believe me," he said, quite frankly, setting down his coffee cup. "You think I'm some crackpot with implicit faith in my fellowmen; but that isn't it at all. I'm a biologist, don't forget, and in biology lies the answer. I am afraid that my experiments are too late to prevent this war—but I might prevent the next."

"How?" I asked, coming to the point.

He didn't answer me immediately. He seemed to be considering something; then his bright little blue eyes fixed on me.

"You say that your business is on its last legs, Bob, and that you are casting around for something fresh. As I recall, you were pretty interested in laboratory work when I used to be your tutor, and what you've forgotten I can soon re-teach you. How would you like to come with me, just the two of us, to Salsback's Island? Then I can show you what I'm doing, and we can be fairly sure of safety if war should break out."

"Where's Salsback's Island?" I demanded.

"It's a small rock plateau in the Azores group which I bought over a year ago. I have my exprimental laboratory there away from all distractions. Matter of fact I've been there for the past twelve months, then a few days ago I flew over here for supplies and medical equipment. Naturally the life isn't gay," he added, grinning, "but it's interesting."

"But what are you doing there?" I asked.

"Fixing it so that this war will definitely be the last. If you decide to come with me I'll explain when we get there; if otherwise, you can't blame me for keeping my mouth shut."

Well, we talked some more in pretty much the same strain, but as I had known I would from the first I finally decided to throw in my lot with him. I'd have shelter, food, and something interesting to occupy me, and maybe escape the brunt of the atomic war. So when he flew back in his private 'plane to the desolate rocky island I went with him, and gained my first insight as to the experiment upon which he was engaged.

FOUR DAYS later, after I had orientated myself to Atlantic storms, winter conditions, and relentless solitude, Salsback seemed to think it was time he explained things. So one morning he took me round his laboratories. They were above ground—strongly built sheds of plastic which defied all the fury of the elements—while underneath them in a natural rock cave in the heart of the island was the plane in which he made his trips to the mainland, a craft which used atomic power in its plant. The engine was a design of Salsback's own. Salsback was way ahead of his time.

The laboratories I found to be pretty similar to all other laboratories I had ever

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seen, biological ones, that is. There were the usual binocular miscroscopes, jars of plasma, sera, and pickled cultures and viruses. I hardly need describe such things; and in any case Salsback jumped so suddenly to the nature of his experiment I had little time to consider the commonplace.

"Peace, Bob," he told me, hands plunged in the pockets of his overalls, and his bald head on one side, "can only come in one way, through inheritance."

I nodded slowly, remembering that he had always been hot on Mendel's theory.

"I wonder," he went on, musing, "if you recall a statement made at the time of the Bikini atom bomb test many years ago? Somebody, I forget who now, suggested that the effects of atom war might be more apparent on posterity than on us ourselves. Why? Because of the atomic radiations affecting the chromosomes, the sources of reproduction, which might produce something different from the ordinary human being. In other words, gargoyles might appear."

"Which isn't a particularly pleasant speculation," I commented, rather naively.

He did not seem to hear me. "It gave me my idea," he said absently. "If atomic radiation could perchance produce a race of gargoyles—disorganized, random atomic energy, that is—could not disciplined atomic energy, in carefully computed doses, produce something different? By that I mean a type of child never known before. One without the eternal lust for power which has been characteristic of man to date."

Salsback was really warming up to it, and I listened intently because he still had that persuasive way of putting things.

"In a way," he proceeded, "I'm enlarging on the original methods of Professor Morgan, who carried out the famous experiment on the fruit-fly, Drosophila melanogaster. He proved that genes, which are chains of still smaller bodies inside the chromosomes, are the real units of heredity. He showed how each gene of the fruit-fly was responsible for some particular characteristic.

"Now, genes and chromosomes are as applicable to a human being as to a fruit-fly, and sudden changes in the genes, such as those caused by atomic force, cause sudden corresponding changes in evolution. But real changes, better known as mutations, are produced by actual alteration in the germ-plasm itself. Understand?"

"You mean orthogenesis?" I suggested.

"Er—in a way," he replied, not looking over convinced. "To cut it short, Bob, germ-plasm changes have happened in human beings and animals in the past. We know that to be so by the self-evident fact that we have reached our present stage of evolution. But these changes can also be artificially produced by atomic-radiation in, as I have said, graduated amounts. This has the effect of altering both genes and germ-plasm which in turn automatically affects the chromosomes. Naturally the individual concerned changes accordingly."

"Uh-huh, I can see that," I granted him; "but how does that produce peace?"

He smiled contentedly. "In these past fifteen years, Bob, I've made it my business to study out every known human emotion and nervous reaction, and I have traced each one to a certain gene or group of genes—just as Professor Morgan traced each individual reaction in the fruit-fly. I have positively proved"—he thumped the bench beside him—"that man's lust for power and domination springs from the action of a certain chain of genes which are inherited, inherited, mark you, from the days of the beast."

I DIDN'T pass any comment because he was in one of those moods of scientific argument when anything might happen. He considered for a moment, then went on again.

"Atomic energy radiation can eliminate that group of genes as completely as evolution has eliminated the tails from our spines. That will mean that all offspring of the humans so treated will be without that chain and consequently the lust for power and other animalistic urges, which will leave behind an intelligent, progressive, non-bellicose man or woman.

"And of course the business will be progressive. All the descendants will be without that chain of genes. It cannot recur, except in very rare cases where of course it will become classed as a recessive unit. That we cannot prevent, but should it appear, it must be destroyed to prevent its perpetuation."

"By recessive unit," I said, "you mean, I suppose, that at times an old order of genes does recur and produces atavistic tendencies?"

"Yes, but that is so remotely unlikely I don't think we need bother ourselves about it."

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FUNNY thing! Looking back, I can see now that that was the one darned thing we should have bothered about.

"In theory it sounds all right," I said finally; "but how can you prove it? You haven't experimented on human beings yet, have you?"

"Obviously not, but I have on animals, including monkeys, whose structure approaches that of the human more closely than anything else. There is not the least doubt that all destructive tendencies have been eliminated. I hardly have to tell you that a monkey is naturally mischievous. I've stopped that. Here, come and take a look for yourself."

He took me on a tour to other parts of the laboratory and I saw things in that next half hour which convinced me he had really got something. The monkeys I saw were quiet but brightly alert. There were also wild animals of various sorts which in the normal way would have been tearing out each others' throats, all of them grouped together in one cage, yet they were quite content, and not stupidly so either. They were quite normal but without any inclination to be vicious.

"These animals are of course the offspring of the animals I treated," Salsback explained, when the tour was over. "They are as the children of treated humans will be. I have only about a month's work to put in on my final calculations as to atomic radiation dosage and then I'm ready to demonstrate the idea to the Medical Association."

"You think they'll listen to you?" I asked him doubtfully.

He had no illusions. "They'll doubt me, Bob; I'm prepared for that, but I have experimental backing and proof which I don't thing they'll be able to gainsay. If they won't listen to me I'll act on my own."

I stared at him in surprise and he added fiercely, "I mean it! I'll kidnap men and women if I have to. I'll do anything! Even the descendants of a single man and woman comprise a tremendous number in a few generations, and with increasing time the old power-lusting type of human would die out. I've just got to succeed, Bob. Call me a man with a mission, if you like, but I'm convinced I have the way to stamp out war, crime, murder, and the like, forever."

This was too sweeping an assertion for me to pass comment upon there and then, but in spite of it I was convinced that he was right. He had got the idea and, scientifically, there was nothing to prevent it developing and producing a perfect race, but when I thought of the prejudices, the criticisms, and the heartaches that were before him, I felt appalled. He was no longer a young man, and he might break down under the onslaught.

This decided me to help him all I could, so that if anything should happen to him I could carry his message and complete the work. He seemed to realize that I meant to do this for he held nothing back from me. Between us we went to work day after day in the laboratory, searching for exactly the right amount of atomic radiation which would have the desired effect on human genes.

It was a laborious job which involved pure mathematics since we had no human beings on which to experiment, and obviously we could not experiment on ourselves. The only real thing we did have was the atomic power plant, specially designed by Salsback, and as ingenious in its method of parting with radiation in graduated doses as was the biological idea itself. But we had to be meticuously careful. As in the case of yeast-cells and X-rays, too much radiation might kill, where just enough would stimulate.

We were on the job as usual one night, with an Atlantic storm blowing hard round our eyrie, when something happened. We might have had some inkling of it had we troubled to listen to the radio during the past week; but we had not done so, otherwise we would have realized that the dreaded atomic war had arrived.

As to its effect once it struck the cities and populations, I have nothing to record. In our lonely position we had no chance to find out the facts, but we certainly knew there was a war in progress when, right in the middle of important computations, there was a sudden unimaginably violent explosion.

It was so unexpected that neither Salsback nor I had any chance to be prepared. We suddenly stopped dead in our tracks, so to speak, and cast each other a fleeting glance as thunderous din burst on our ears. Then the lights went out and there was a sense of unbearable pressures and whelming darkness.

I DID NOT lose consciousness, but for all practical purposes I was completely ex-

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communicated from life. It seemed that I had fallen into a state of timeless drifting, and for that reason I cannot say how long the condition lasted. Also I was out of touch with Salsback.

Then by degrees this immense darkness and sense of crushing confinement began to lift. I glimpsed the grayness of daylight and felt warm, wet wind from the sea. Like steam from glass the opacity disappeared, and I was lying on my back on rocks, staring across the narrow reaches of the island to a sombre ocean. Beside me, Salsback was staring too.

Except for scratches and bruises he looked no different—well, just a bit different. That keen, brilliant look had gone from his blue eyes, and they were utterly puzzled.

"What the devil happened?" I asked blankly.

He did not answer, and gradually it came to me how different things seemed. For one thing our plastic laboratory had utterly disappeared without trace. For another there was an intense solitude over everything, as though the world were empty. The only thing that made a noise was the ocean. Even the wind was somehow muted.

"I just don't understand this," Salsback whispered at last. Then he got to his feet and gazed over the bleak, empty scene. Going away from me over the uneven rocks he began an exploration. After a moment or two I got up and followed him.

The things we found were puzzling. There were remains of instruments from the laboratory lying buried in the rock crevices, but the odd thing was that they were crumbling away with rust. All the laboratory fittings and equipment had been made of incorrodible metal, or to be more exact resistant to rust for hundreds of years, yet here was ferrous oxide doing its worst, and it hardly seemed probable that air and spume were the root causes.

Of the laboratory itself there wasn't the least sign, or of the house part which had been attached. The only thing remaining was the airplane which we found buried underground and more or less normal; but even here rust was eating into certain parts. Fortunately the atomic motor was normal enough, with its life of many hundreds of years.

We spent perhaps six hours prowling and pondering, using up some of the provisions which were in the plane's sealed refrigerator, then we sat down together in the driving cabin and thought things out, or tried to.

"It looks," I said, musing, "as though instead of being away for a matter of perhaps a few hours we have been away for years, even centuries . . . Everything points to it."

"I believe that we have," Salsback answered, brooding. "But it's only a guess," he added, as I looked at him in wonder, "and I'm not going to base my opinion on the few evidences we've found on this island. The thing to do is to take a look at what has happened in the outer world. There we'll find all the proof we need. In any case we must try and find some provisions. Those we have in the refrig' won't last very long. So we'll have a sleep, patch the plane up, and then be on our way."

The patching up business took us a couple of days, however. Then, everything tested to our satisfaction, we hauled the plane up the narrow rocky slide from below and took off. The atomic power motor functioned perfectly and we sped across the gray, heaving waters with steady, silent rhythm.

But gradually we realized once again how different everything was. Normally it is about 1,300 miles from the Azores to London, yet, though there was no doubt as to our course, the instruments functioning perfectly, we covered 2,000 miles without seeing a trace of Ireland or the British Isles. Even Europe had disappeared, or rather there were little islands here and there where Europe had been which suggested, grim thought, that they might be the tops of mountains which had once reared from the vast European plain.

FOR most of the trip we were both of us too astonished by the view of everlasting waters to pass any comments, but as time went on, we flew in varying directions in the vain hope of finding familiar land.

"This decides it, Bob," Salsback at last said slowly. "We did stay away for centuries in what appeared to be minutes. I'm afraid we have proved one theory of an atomic explosion which isn't very palatable, namely that atomic force, under certain conditions, can for a time twist objects near it into hyper-space.

"In other words, the object is hurled out of the normal space-time continuum like a ball on the end of an elastic; then when the elastic retracts, when the warp straight-

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ens out, the object returns to the normal position, as we did. While we were in non-space-time, brief though it seemed to our senses, heavens knows how long a period passed in the normal world."

I suppose I should have been stunned by this pronouncement but for some reason I wasn't. In fact I had half arrived at this conclusion already. What really worried me was the endless water. To have traveled through time, through a spatial warp, was bad enough, but to find nothing but water upon return was even worse, and I said so.

"I can think of only one explanation," Salsback said, after studying the empty void of heaven in which no birds flew. "The atomic war must have been so diabolically thorough that oxygen and hydrogen combined during the radiation onslaught and formed water, burying all the continents and turning the earth into something pretty close to a hydrosphere. Come to think of it," he finished, sighing, "it's the only logical outcome,"

"Then we're the last men on an empty watery world?" I asked, aghast.

"That's the way it looks, Bob. There may have been others who were thrown into and out of a warp as we were, but how we are to find them I don't know, and few would have the luck to be on an island as we were. Most would presumably drown by returning to sunken continents. It seems to me that perhaps the continents were smashed by atomic force and the waters rolled in over them. Small islands were not inundated because the water level remained substantially the same."

For a space we flew on without making any further comment; then after perhaps twenty minutes we crossed a small island in the all-inclusive ocean. There was something on it resembling buildings, and though I couldn't judge accurately at our height it seemed to me as though monstrous penguins populated it, or if not penguins then creatures of a definitely aquatic nature.

"We're not alone in the world, then," Salsback said rather dryly, looking down; "though those are quite the strangest ocean denizens I ever saw."

"But intelligent," I pointed out. "They turned their heads to watch us as we flew over."

My mind had begun to revolve around all sorts of theories. Martians perhaps? Or anyway creatures from another planet who had arrived in the lapse of time after the atomic convulsion had engulfed the world?

"Best thing we can do is get back to our own island and try and figure out what we're going to do," Salsback said at length. "We have a few provisions left in the plane and our job is to decide what we do when they're gone. For all the chance we seem to stand of getting food we might as well be dead at this very moment!"

He swung the machine's nose around and again following the course by instruments we made the return trip, taking it in turns at the controls or else putting in the robot-gear. A night came, in which a quite normal moon glowed, a day again, another night, then as dawn was coming we settled back on our island with nothing to show for our tremendous journey except the worry in our faces.

"I've made a checkup on food supplies," Salsback said, getting up from the controls. "We've enough for a week, and fresh water we can always get from filtering the sea through our tanks. But I don't know if you're thinking what I'm thinking," he finished quietly.

"That it's staving off the evil hour?" I asked him.

"Just that." His bald head nodded in the cabin lights. "We are in a world in which we don't fit, Bob. The world we knew has been overwhelmed by a second Deluge. Our instruments for the original experiment we were making have gone and of course they can never be replaced. I don't know about you, but I'm not the type to endure a slow death from starvation."

He looked across at our solitary defense gun.

"There are a hundred small proton shells in that," he went on. "If the worst happens, and I don't see how it can fail to, we can empty them from the magazine and detonate them all in one blast, in here. It will be quick, clean and . . . sensible."

I fell moodily silent. A man does not admit he wants to die that easily. Salsback was looking at it from the viewpoint of an elderly man, which I couldn't share. In fact I wanted to rave at the crazy fate which had planted us in such an impossible position.

He did not badger me for an answer. Instead he wandered to the rear of the airplane and inspected our food supplies again. I remained where I was, looking absently

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through the window on to the gray waters and the dawn sky. Then I had a shock. I saw what at first I took to be planes approaching. Then as they came nearer I realized that they were birds, gigantic birds too, with a colossal wingspread.

"Doc!" I yelled, leaping up. "Look!"

SALSBACK stumbled across to join me and for a moment or two we stood watching the flying "things" as they circled and swept lower and lower towards our airplane. Then I felt Salsback dragging at my arm fiercely.

So intently had I been looking upwards I had failed to notice that queer, penguinlike beings were waddling like an army of waiters out of the ocean and over the rocks towards us. They were perhaps five feet tall, web-footed of course, but with very human-looking arms instead of flippers, and faces that somehow were not completely fishlike.

"I don't like the looks of this," Salsback muttered, seizing the gun and sighting it. "They're after us! Remember that they saw our plane. They must have followed us."

"But suppose they are harmless enough and merely want to communicate?" I demanded.

"And suppose they're not?" His face was grim. "If we don't hit first and ask questions afterwards, it may be the end of us, and I prefer an end that's cleaner than being pecked or hacked to bits by a collection of flying fish and pot-bellied penguins."

I still felt that he was acting precipitately, but there was no opportunity to stop him. He swung the gun round, sighted it, and then fired, driving a stream of hellish protonic shells into the queer flying and waddling army.

The damage he did in so short a time was appalling. A scythe sweeping grass is about the best simile I can think of, but though he worked without pause, swinging the gun above and at ground level, the beings still came on, settling as thick as seagulls on an islet around our solitary plane.

At last the ammunition was exhausted. And still they came.

"Well," I said grimly, "that finishes it. We've nothing left with which to blow ourselves up, and wiping out scores of these things hasn't made any apparent impression."

Salsback was silent, haggard, gazing at the queer scaly half-human faces which were peering through the portholes and main windows. There was a sound outside like the rippling of discordant music as the "things" evidently conversed among themselves.

Then suddenly the plane door was slammed inwards, its lock snapped by the battering of a piece of rock. Amidst an overpowering fishy odour three of the "penguins" came waddling into our cabin and stood regarding us.

That strange, remotely human appearance was more than ever evident now. Despite the scales the outline of a human being was unmistakable; shoulders, legs, arms, but webbed feet and hands. The eyes were completely round and set in the front of the head instead of at the sides, eyes which were covered by a hard watery membrane. There were vestiges of what might have been a nose, and a thin scar of a mouth.

"For the love of heaven, what are they?" Salsback whispered, staring at them. Then he glanced out of the window. "Those flying things are similar too, except for the addition of wings."

The chattering speech which broke from the tallest of the three creatures didn't make the slightest sense to us and we simply stared dumbly throughout the performance. Finally the creature seemed to become impatient and to our astonishment went over to the control board and sat down—yes, sat down—in the chair, its round, fishy eyes fixed on the switches.

"Don't tell me it's going to drive the plane!" I gasped.

I got my answer in a moment or two. Further piping orders had the effect of making the other fish-men fit the cabin door into place, then the one at the control board applied the power by moving the correct switches with his webbed fingers. Salsback and I stood watching helplessly as the plane swept into the air and across the endless ocean.

What route we took neither of us had any idea, but after flying for perhaps two hours an island loomed up in the far distance, and followed by flocks of the flying fish we circled high above it. It didn't make sense to me, or I think to Salsback, that there should be a sprawling city down there, fairly well designed too with a central street and others radiating at right angles from it. But it was there and we were dropping swiftly towards it.

Salsback's eyes met mine blankly, but I

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was commencing to wonder about many things. If this being could sit at the control board and drive the plane so perfectly, why should not he and others like him be able to build a city? Queer, really, how the obvious truth persisted in remaining out of sight just round the corner.

ONCE the plane had landed in the city—which at close quarters proved to be quite well built and almost indistinguishable from any provincial town, we found ourselves ordered outside, by signals chiefly, and so we stepped into a gathered mob of the creatures who did everything they could to catch a glimpse of us.

So finally, protected on both sides, we were led into a building, along a wide stone hall, and then into a great empty room, or rather nearly empty. There were benches arranged in semi-circular rows but nobody was seated on them. In this gaunt, bare space we were motioned to sit down and two of the fish-men guards remained to keep an eye on us.

I looked at Salsback troubledly. "Any ideas?" I questioned.

"Not any that bear weight," he sighed. "At the moment I'm past forming theories, I'm just feeling glad that we are not so utterly alone as we had thought."

This speculation may have cheered him but it didn't me. I had the unpleasant feeling that we were running neck and crop into something decidedly dangerous.

After a time, half an hour perhaps, there were signs of activity as members of the strange race began to enter the room. Sometimes they came singly, sometimes in pairs, and without once glancing at us they went and took up positions on the forms which were raised tier upon tier above each other.

It was to me grimly suggestive of a court of law, a suspicion which deepened in my mind when twenty-seven of the beings had assembled, and one in particular took up a central position and sat gazing down upon us. It was, I suppose, the queerest situation in which two Earth men had ever found themselves.

The flutelike remarks of the central one, whom I mentally dubbed as "The Judge," made no impression on us of course, and to show as much we shrugged our shoulders. Promptly another of the beings got up and began, with obvious effort, to talk in English. He spoke it rustily, like somebody struggling valiantly with a dead language.

"You—er—are ancient men," he said at length, and Salsback glanced at me.

"Ancient?" he repeated, gazing back at the assembly. "We're nothing of the sort! We represent a modern age—"

"But a modern age that has gone," the interpreter pointed out. "You are throwbacks." He seemed to be getting a grip on the language now. "Your physical structure and your airplane both place you as Pre-Atom men, which to us means prehistoric."

"Prehistoric!" I ejaculated, stung. "Why, what era—what year—is this?"

"The year Fourteen Hundred of the Post-Atom Era. You date back to a period some five thousand years ago before the Catastrophe and the Deluge."

"You mean that you are Earth people?" Salsback demanded, obviously finding the business hard to credit.

"Certainly we are." There was even dignity in the queer being for a moment. "The atom war destroyed the world in which beings of your type existed. Continents went under the waves; radio-active force was everywhere. There were survivors on mountain tops and islands, but they too had changed. Their offsprings were different. There was a great mutational alteration and gradually we evolved."

"Great Scot," I whispered. "That's the very thing you were trying to do, Doc—alter the genes. The atom war did it for them."

"And nature added her percentage," he added. "I should have thought of that. Nature will always find a balance, just as it has here. There being no land left the germplasm altered to the existing environment and produced flying aquatic beings who live in water and air and yet retain functions which are basically human."

HE BECAME silent again. The gathered assembly had allowed him to go on speaking, perhaps in the hope of learning something.

"That," said the interpreter, after the judge had listened to a jabber of words, "is correct. We are the new race, and we populate the deeps, the air, and what bit of land there is left. We thrive and we progress. Since the Great Mutation there has been no strife amongst us and the secrets of the atom have been lost in the Deluge, and as far as we are concerned will remain lost. So it should be since none of us has any wish to fight

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the other. That way lies the destruction which overwhelmed the race from which we sprang, and of which you are still a part."

"Just a minute," Salsback said slowly. "Do you mean to say that you are a peaceful peoples with no wish to fight? No lusting after power?"

"That," said the interpreter, "is the situation."

Salsback stared for a moment, then he shook his bald head wearily and gave a wistful smile. "The very thing I set out to do nature accomplished for me," he muttered. "The old lady has stolen a decided march this time."

"What was it you set out to do?" the interpreter asked. "How does it come about that you are in this Post-Atom Era?"

Salsback hesitated, then with technical details concerning hyper-space, time, and the effects of atomic energy radiation, he explained exactly what had happened. The beings listened in stony attention without once interrupting. When it was over they conversed in their weird voices for a while; then the interpreter spoke again.

"We neither believe nor disbelieve your story, my friends. In fact we are just not interested. But it does so happen that in this peaceful, ordered community there sometimes have appeared beings such as you, beings we call throwbacks. They are caused by the action of what you call the recessive unit. In other words, men and women of the Pre-Atom Era emerge from time to time full of the old urge to power and destruction which brought about the end of the earlier civilization."

"But we're not recessive units!" Salsback cried, leaping to his feet. "Good heavens, all we want to do is live as peacefully as you do. We want to—"

"I am sorry, my friend, but we have an inflexible law regarding the appearance of these archaic types. They must, for the good of our race at large, be eliminated before their atavistic power-lust can upset the peaceful minds of the rest of the community. You say that you had an experiment afoot, that a bomb blew you into hyper-space and out of it. At least your story is more original than that of the other throwbacks we have so far discovered. They merely said they had come here and didn't know how."

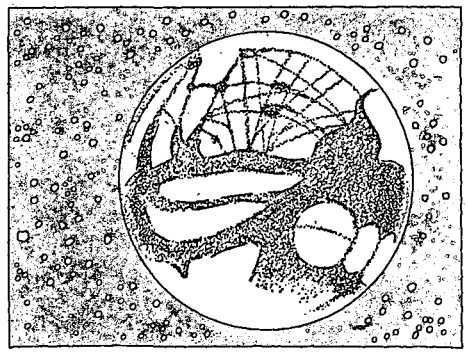
"Then they must have been survivors, like us," Salsback insisted. "Only they evidently hadn't the scientific knowledge to grasp what had happened to them."

"Be that as it may," the interpreter said, after communicating with the judge for a moment, "this court is adamant. You clearly showed your tendencies when you killed and maimed hundreds of our fellows without even attempting to reason. That is a fair sample of a pre-Atom man and by it you both stand self-condemned."

There was nothing we could do to alter the decision. It was cold, ruthless, yet understandable justice. But, writing these last words with Salsback beside me, as we await the carrying out of the death sentence, I cannot help but see something remotely funny about it.

We who tried to make a perfect race, and theorized on how recessive units should be eliminated, are ourselves condemned by the perfect race because we are recessive units.

Ironical? I think so.



Coming Next Issue: REALITIES UNLIMITED, an Amazing Novelet of an Expedition to Mars, by EMMETT McDOWELL

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THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Continued fom page 8)

a summons to a forgotten land where men of their stripe are needed, to a land where pantheism reigns almost supreme and where many forms of animal life have won social and intellectual life equal to that of their human compatriots.

It is and isolated land threatened with a peculiarly terrible sort of civil war. Modern weapons are needed desperately if humanity is to retain its ancient margin of superiority over the beast—and Eric Nelson, Sloan, Van Voss and Company are the only men available with both weapons and knowhow.

They have little choice but to accept the assignment—and from the outset find themselves struggling against deadly forces that are far from human. When at last they reach the valley which is their destination they find themselves facing an even grimmer decision—whether to fullfill their contract or to fight for the other side, the side of beasts and men combined in the strangest of social democracies. It is a decision which splits the group of adventurers and forces them into battle against one another.

From here on in the story is Eric Nelson's—and it is a story with a conclusion as astounding as any which science fiction has yet produced. Mr. Hamilton is in top form in THE VALLEY OF CREATION—and has written a novel no true science fiction fan will want to overlook.

An author not unfamiliar to readers of these pages, Henry Kuttner, takes over the Hall of Fame Classic in July with one of his finest early stories, WHEN THE EARTH LIVED. In this story Mr. Kuttner propounds a truly startling and original premise—that the Earth is actually animate being and that all life, as we know it, is merely parasitical growth upon its outer surface.

What happens when a scientist is able to prove this thesis convincingly is, in its way, even more terrible than the atom bomb. WHEN THE EARTH LIVED is both ingenious and truly frightening. In it, Mr. Kuttner reveals to the full the talents that have since made him one of the truly great names in science fiction.

Thanks to our new enlarged format, instead of a handful of short stories to fill out the issue, there will be at least one novelet and a fat half dozen—give or take one—short stories, selected from a list which includes such stellar names as L. Ron Hubbard, Jack Vance, Margaret St. Clair, Emmett McDowell, Ray Bradbury and others with work at hand. A losing combination from such a list will demand something like editorial genius in reverse.

Oh yes, and your editor will be also present with his review of the science fiction fan magazines and his editorial carpings, give and take plenty. All in all it should be a fine issue.

ETHERGRAMS

THE ether, as has become its recent custom, has been abulge with messages this time. Well, we've got plenty of space in the enlarged SS to run the pick of the crop, so here goes. The opening epistle stems back to our editorial in the January issue as to what constitutes science fiction. With which, we let the readers take the stage:

CURRENT YATEDA
by Paul Anderson

Dear Editor: Concerning the current yateda anent Fantasy and SF, I'd say that it's all a matter of **supposition** and **fact.**

1. A story is a fantasy when any or all basic conditions used are assumed or supposed.

2. A story is science-fiction when its plot embodies actual or accepted fact.

Okay! You write a story concerned with the fact that all radio-active substances will darken photographic plates and cause a discharge of electrified bodies. (By "radio-active substances" I don't mean Henry Morgan's skin, or Fred Allen's hair. . .) Then, into his story, heretofor employing only **factual data,** the writer introduces a radioactive which does **not** darken photographic plates or cause a discharge of electrified bodies.

Ergo, he has written a **fantasy,** because **all** radioactives are alike in the two actions of darkening and discharging. And, there's no use in saying that the dreamed-up radio-active *comes from the Purple Planet, or the Ixt dimension,* cause there aint no such thing— as **yet.** Sure, there may be little green men wearing cement overcoats living in a mad, invisible dimension, **but**—until it's **fact**—it's fantasy.

Hannes Bok just never strikes out, either in writing or illustrating. **The Blue Flamingo** is often beautiful and never dull. It reminds one of Merritt—not the style—but the scenery, and the gal. On the cover, she looks as though she's preparing to dive into some remote, cold water. Funny . . . no matter how brainy, culturally advanced, or alien the babe is, she always falls for Mister Earthman. In this case, I think she fell for a stupid character whom the Great Ones should have turned into a pasture. By the way, "Va Khoseth yaga" is ancient Martian for, "Get lost, you jerk!"

Aleph Sub One isn't overly notable, but it fits, it fits. I *like machines that go crazy. What if Oona hadn't figured* a way to wise up the calculator? Tch! Tch! No more Soma for Oona . . . that's the Whost part of it.

The Conquest of Two Worlds, doesn't belong in the up-to-date SS. Its science is all awry, and the plot has been written to finer effect by many authors. It just keeps going nowhere and then stops.

Ultra Evolution, is old stuff. It's written pretty well, though. The evolved fellow becomes a sort of "Bacteria, Unattached", like Kinnison, maybe.

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Guaranteed brings up a burning question: who'll use pencils a million years from now?

The Ether Vibrates (Nervous anasthetic?) is outstanding. Why doesn't it come in and sit down?—**6702 Windsor, Berwyn, Illinois.**

Until you started chopping, Paul, you presented your thesis intelligibly. But there is one catch—if science progresses with ever-increasing speed, it seems highly probable that, according to your definition, much of what is termed fantasy at present will ultimately become drear fact.

Blast it, fantasy cannot be quite so neatly packaged and labeled. One of the factors which creates fantasy is the ability to withstand all the tags and definitions of those limited intellects which insist upon having everything in the acceptable world cut and dried. Such a world may be acceptable to some, but its very prosiness and logic makes it anathema to the many.

BRIEFIE
by Mrs. Glen Burkhart

Dear Editor: I have been reading STARTLING STORIES for quite some time and really enjoy them. I have a bone to pick, though, on the January issue. THE BLUE FLAMINGO was a very good story and for that reason it roused my ire—the way Hannes Bok left his ending. It seemed to leave the story hanging in mid-air. Why not have him write a sequel to tell us if Hibbert ever gets back to Khoire. I'm curious.—**9192 Adams, Taylorville, Illinois.**

Well, if Mr. Bok is willing, we are. Incidentally, Mrs. Burkhart, you are not the only one with such feelings about the novel in question—as continued perusal of this editorial peristyle will reveal.

HEAVYWEIGHT
by Master Sergeant Alfred B. Lane

Dear Editor: After reading Science-Fiction for fifteen years, I finally got stirred up enough to write a letter to the Ed. I noticed talk about resuming the Capt. Future stories. Well, I want to throw my weight (230 lbs) on the side against such a procedure. Although the first few were good, the rest followed the same plot. And, in every story, the author went into long-winded explanations of how, and why, Capt. Future and his friends, came into being. Very nauseating. Anyway, if you read one story, you read them all.

The Blue Flamingo, in your Jan. issue, was a good story alright, and held my interest. But, where do you get off sticking it in an STF mag. That story was strictly fantasy, or I'll eat my stripes.

The Contest of Two Worlds, was certainly number one for me. Was really worth-while printing in the Hall of Fame. Let's have more on the same lines.

Aleph Sub One was very good, also. I always did enjoy those Oona and Jick stories. (Contrary opinion, Phooey)

As for Ultra-Evolution, and Guaranteed—two phooeys. They could have been left out, and never missed.

You certainly have a top illustrator in Bergey.

Why are so many fans picking on young Wigodsky? No matter what his age is, his money entitles him to an opinion as much as anyone else.

I notice Burgess states that Merritt can't approach Hammond. That is beyond me. Did Burgess ever read either "Seven Footprints to Satan" or "The Moon Pool"? I fail to see how anyone can approach those two books. Personally I would like to be able to get hold of all of Merritt's books, with the exception of "The Ship of Ishtar". I'll admit that one wasn't good. But an author is allowed one foul ball every now and then, isn't he?

Say, that boy Evans is some poet. (You are all right yourself, ED, slightly corny, though. You did help me to find a word for arrow poison, in my crossword puzzle, in that short poem of your)

Whether Rick Sneary mispells on purpose or not, I don't know. I do like his letters, because they are interesting.

Excuse the long letter, but after fifteen years, I still haven't got it all out of my system.—**AF 6558454 Room 201, Postoffice Bldg. Wakefield, R. I.**

Well, Sergeant (it still seems funny for this ex-Sarge to address others by that title) you can throw in Ye Ed's 220 pounds on your side where Captain Future is concerned. We thought at one time of replacing it with a series about a surgeon of the spaceways of time to come entitled Captain Suture, but nothing ever came of it. Yeah, on the whole we too are grateful.

A nice letter, Sergeant Lane—and if you still do have more in your system, let us have it. Hope you like us in larger format too.

AND NOW A CORPORAL
by T/5 James G. White

Dear Editor: I was in the hospital PX for cigarettes when I noticed the January issue of SS, the first I'd seen in nearly a year (you don't see any science fiction in Italy). So I dropped fifteen cents on the counter and grabbed the mag.

The first thing I saw was the cover (natch!!) and I think it was zooper, if a little—er—revealing. Don't you think? Or don't you?

Then I turned to the Ethergrams to see what I had missed. According to the majority of opinions I hadn't missed much. The most interesting and mature letter of the whole batch happened to be the last, by Marion "Astra" Zimmer. Marion's letter mentioned that she had been reading SS and TWS for a year and I wonder if this worthy person would be interested in selling some of the accumulated stf mags she has.

Now to give my unworthy opinion—the first and by far the best—THE BLUE FLAMINGO. I wish someone would write a sequel to that story, preferably Hannes Bok. The second—ALEPH SUB ONE. Pretty good, if it was possible. The third—THE CONQUEST OF TWO WORLDS. Fine if you like reading history, even future history. Fourth—ULTRA EVOLUTION. Nice, if you can think of a machine of that type, a nice little thing that thought recorder. Just the thing to pull on hubby to see if he really was staying up with a sick lodge brother. Fifth—GUARANTEED. A sweet little comic.

Now, as for the illustrations—the one on page 13 was cute only the girl doesn't resemble either the girl on the cover or on page 19—which was also nifty. I also liked the one illustrating UTLRA EVOLUTION. Pretty little BEM.—**RA 19247861 Ward A26, Camp Kilmer Station Hosp., N. J.**

You write a sprightly letter, Corporal White. But if it fails to win the response it merits, it might pay you to eye the fanzine review in the back of the issue for information as to which amateur magazines constitute informal trading marts in just what you are seeking. Good luck and let us know how you come out.

STAR MEMORY
by Sue Chadwick

Dear Sir: I nominate Ed Hamilton's THE STAR OF LIFE as my favorite story for the Hall of Fame. Though it was written a comparatively short time ago I find my-

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self reading it over and over.—**1500 South Pearl, Compton, California.**

Thanks, Sue. However, it is definite policy not to rerun a story for the HoF until at least ten years after its initial magazine appearance.

WE'LL BITE—WHAT?
by George Andrews

Dear Sir: I'm the guy that's getting headaches trying to follow your fans' comments. But an old axiom of mine, "For dear old Eli" and "I'm a Harvard man myself" come to the rescue. So, regarding, "What has Cheops got that I haven't got!" here goes—

Aulf dan Sings—Wood din Boof
Kron de mitts—whim de Doof
Pro de Con—Mon du Duff
Yip von Slub—Uff Cub Cruff
Erb, Blurp,Slurp—and Bluff

Translated—"I'm hungry enough for three boxes of Super Whost. I have an idea it tastes like cornflakes and I'm eating perpetual blue-plates of it. I hope I'm re-incarnated in Oona's time so I can have all the Super Whost I want. Till then, I'll moon over a can of Treet and lettuce salad and hope for more Yerba Mate instead of Baya Mate tea."

All this is on the cuff, Ed, so write it on ice and, as for the CIRCLE OF ZERO, roll your hoop with it. It wouldn't even make a plastic disc for playing tiddly-winks.—**8917 Cumberland Avenue, Cleveland 4, Ohio.**

Gad, George, elucidate—*please!* Whost to blame, you, us or the epistleers?

LAND OF THE VREE
by Paula Vreeland

Dear Editor: Please give me a break even if I am using a pencil for one of your sacred screeds. I was reading your ETHERGRAMS at the kitchen table and when I got up to look for a pen I failed—signally. Then I wanted a cup of coffee to aid the easy flow of ideas. I turned on the cold-water faucet in the sink and blooie! Off came the whole thing in my hand, spraying the place like a demented hydrant. It's rather damp in here now, but with a casual smile on my face I proceed. Nothing will deter me from my self-allotted duty. What is my duty? A few smears, a few cheers.

THE BLUE FLAMINGO—the English is poor. Bad construction, wrong tenses—but I'm guilty myself. Still, writers get paid; don't they? The story action is lumpy at first, but what a plot! The plot is really worthy of a master.

ALEPH SUB ONE—gorgeous. What did they used to say, Editor—the cat's pajamas?

GUARANTEED—Gee whiz, if that isn't the cutest story I ever read!

Most of the letters are good. I especially noticed those by Ward Mulcahy, Jerri and David (Doc) Rasche. Doc, you aren't related to a Burton Rasche, are you?

I'm warning everyone, too, to lay off Sneary. If you all had half the sense he's got you'd be all right.—**7224 Page, St. Louis, Missouri.**

Sorry about the faucet, Paula, but the letter is fun despite the thumbs-down on Bok's literary style. And why drag Burton Rascoe into this? He's never bothered an stf fan yet as far as we know. Check and double-check on Sneary.

HIS BABY'S BOK
by Gerry de la Ree

Dear Sir: **"Va khoseth yaga!"** Shades of H. P. Lovecraft!

But while this phrase climaxed Hannes Bok's excellent "The Blue Flamingo" in typical HPL style, the novel itself was another outstanding example of Bok's rightful claim to the crown of the late "master of fantasy," A. Merrrit.

"The Blue Flamingo" stands as the best piece of pure fantasy to have appeared in the pages of SS since it first saw the light of day in 1939. That's not a very big statement, of course, since SS has presented few real fantasies.

But I am making a rather broad statement when I say that Bok is today the nearest thing in the field to Merritt. Bok did an excellent job in completing Merritt's "The Fox Woman" for the New Collectors Group last year and it is reported that the forthcoming "Black Wheel" is an even better example of Bok's talent.

The cover illustration, incidentally, was better than usual, although it might be better in the future if Bergey could get together with the interior artist (who in this case was Stevens, I presume?) The interior artwork for "The Blue Flamingo" was excellent.

As for the rest of the issue: Send Margaret St. Clair back to wherever she emanated from and tell her to take Oona and Jick with her. The Hall of Fame has served its purpose, I believe, and can be eliminated. Congrats to E. E. Evans on an amusing short-short.

The letter department hit a new peak with this issue. The letters are longer and more interesting than I ever remember them as having been in SS. It's certainly a vast improvement over the Sarge Saturn days.

While I appreciate the kind words you had for my fanzine, SUN SPOTS, in the review column, might I make a few corrections? The last issue did not contain the results of an author poll. Rather it was a poll to determine the favorite stories of the ten "leading" authors, who had been selected in six previous polls conducted over a period of seven years by Art Widner and myself.

I believe your readers might be interested in the results, which rated the following stories as the best by their respective authors: Van Vogt—"Slan"; A. Merritt—"The Moon Pool"; H. P. Lovecraft—"The Outsider"; Stan Weinbaum—"A Martian Odyssey"; H. G. Wells—"The Time Machine"; Robert Heinlein—"Universe"; Henry Kuttner—"Mimsy Were the Borogoves"; John Campbell—"Twilight"; L. Sprague de Camp—"Lest Darkness Fall"; E. E. Smith—"The Grey Lensman."

At the recent Philadelphia Science Fiction Convention I conducted another poll which had the following results: favorite living stf-fantasy authors: 1. Kuttner, 2. Van Vogt, 3. Heinlein, 4. de Camp, 5. E. E. Smith. Favorite deceased authors: 1. A. Merritt. 2. Weinbaum, 3. Lovecraft, 4. Wells, 5. Jameson. Favorite fans—1. Forrest Ackerman, 2. Joe Kennedy, 3. Bob Tucker, 4. Sam Moskowitz.—**9 Bogert Place, Westwood, New Jersey.**

Thanks, Gerry, it's good to hear from you again and at such length. We're marking time of the Hall of Fame until present selections are exhausted. At that time, we intend to consult the expressed opinion of our readers, who have, like yourself, been writing in about the feature. The real problem, of course, is that with rare exceptions, the so-called old timers simply aren't in it with the writers of today—although it may take some years for dyed-in-the mutton fans to become aware of this fact.

We're sorry about the SUN SPOTS error and are glad to print your explanation of the truth as well as the fan-pool results. Keep the crits coming.

DREAM BOAT—HUH!
by Rick Sneary

Dear Dream Boat: Well your 'ittle friend is back. After reading, (and looking at) the Jan., 1948, issue of SS I just had to write. A very outstanding one indeed.

Aaaa, Burgey! You know if he could ever draw what he wanted to I'll bet he would turn out a master peace. Now take this one, (and I wish I could.) Nice colors. No glaring reds, and even the yellow wasn't to bright. Nice flowing lines. Nice eyes. Nice neck. Nice br——AAA—

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beak. And then the writing was all over to one side. Yes, all in all I believe this is the best cover you have had.

Stevens (?) no longer need worry about copying Finley. He is now better than VF. To bad, he can't do the whole issue. But then no Mad Marchioni this time, so again we all can be glad.

Bok was surprising. THE BLUE FLAMINGO was your best sence STAR OF LIFE. But, it had compareatively no plot at all. Only the beautiful flow of words that Bok pores out could make up for the undeveluped and not to exciting story. Of course it was in the ture Merrit school of writing, which is more of a complament than not. Bok who has finished a few of Merrit's unfinished works is doubtlessly better equiped to write like the old master than anyone elce.

His word pictures of the odd beings, especially the weird preast of the land they first excaped too are wonderful. I would love to see Walt Disney to do that on film, like in "Make Mine Music." As I said the only regreatable thing is he did not work things out fether. I would have been interested to read more about the sea people, and thos fuzzy ones. Oh well a sequel is called for anyway.

Now after that one could expect the rest of the stories to be only second rate, but your **HaF** story fooled me. I, in the past haven't liked your choises. But this really was a clasic. THE CONQUEST OF TWO WORLDS was really better than the novel, and is the best**HoF** story I have read execpting the unforgetable MARTION ODYSSEY. And about the best picture of Earths conquest of space I have read. That is if we reach the planets still thinking and acting as we do today. Few stories have pictured better the hreatlessnes of a more powerful people over weaker ones.

I doubt that anyone will chalange me if I say there are few weak people that are not today being pushed around. The Chineese by there own people, and Russia. And most of us by now have heard the reports of the Indains (our Indain citizens, whos land we took away from them) are underprivelaged and in some cases starving. Yep. I hope there aren't any Martions. For there sake.

Mrs. St. Clair was at the other end of her pendlem swing. Turning out the worse story sence SOMO RACKS. I'm trough trying to figger it. She is a gifted writer, and turns out good stories, and then awful. Her backgrounds are very good, but sometime a might imprackicable. The idea of sea-green hair was a killer. I can believe it too.

ULTRA EVOLUTION was not just like others of it's kine, but not outstanding.

GUARANTEED was a lu-lu. Boy what a ending. I can hardly amagin Evans thinking it up. He is more the Hamilton type. Boy was it good. And sticking the ending over on the other page was a good idea. Keeps you from cheeting. I'm glad I didn't.

Well Ethergrams was good too. And stop picking on elRoy. I have no trouble reading him. All you have to do is think what he is going to say and see if it fits. I admire him. He actually must study to write that way. With me it comes natural.

Weber should get lost in Feilds. (Ha. it's to old for the young ones, they didn't get it.) I would have been inclined to agree about you printing uninteresting letters, but you didn't this time.—**2962 Santa Ana St., South Gate, Calif.**

As usual, Rick, upon receipt of one of your amazing missives, we remain stunned and grateful and with absolutely nothing to say. You've said it all—:

THE RIGHT WRIGHT WRITES
by Roscoe E. Wright

Dear Editor: I am rather pleased with some fellow named Editor for picking out that grand lead novel "The Blue Flamingo" by Hannes Bok. Here was a story with vast philosophical concepts waiting for those who cared to probe beneath its colorful surface. The presentation of humans in their faulty form and its consequential "chill" was very powerful. Bok here has written a novel both for the "intellectual" and the "thrill-seeking" public. That is not very easy to do but I wish he would write more often and draw too.

College keeps me busy, so briefly: I liked "Aleph Sub One" for its freshening atmosphere, "Guaranteed" for the laugh it gave me but I couldn't even force myself to read "The Conquest of Two Worlds". This time Polton Cross sounded like a rather lifeless warm-over from the bad ole' days.

Like the fine note of improvement both in STARTLING and WONDER, especially the face-lifting on the latter.—**Rt. 2 Box 264, Springfield, Oregon.**

Well, both books have had their visages elevated since you wrote this one, Roscoe, and we hope you continue to enjoy them. Incidentally, what college are you going to and what are you studying? We're interested, of course.

HERE'S BILLIE LEE AGAIN
by Billie Lee Randolph

Dear Ed.: Well, well well. I am sending this from my new address in Calif. I hope that you don't object, (Ahem). Since it seems to be customary, I'll give my reactions to the cover. Bergy is improving. At least he keeps up with the changing fashions. The long skirt did not in the least detract from the exibition of her figure. Also she is dressed almost exactly as the author described her, even if she never appeared at that particular place.

Now for TEV. That's what I read first, so I'll describe my feelings toward it first. The letters are all entertaining, especially mine. Heh, heh, heh. But really my favorites are Wigodsky (you can tell he comes from Texas. 'Ray!) Sneary, and REWard. J. Van Couvering is a close runner-up. I disagree with Wally Weber. I think other peoples' opinions are very interesting. It gives something to talk about if they decide to correspond.

1) THE BLUE FLAMINGO—Hannes Bok. Give us more. Catch me for I swoon.

2) ALEPH SUB ONE—St. Clair. She gives me a laugh while I'm in the midst of worries over her characters.

3) THE CONQUEST OF TWO WORLDS—Hamilton. Good old world wrecker Hamilton.

The other stories are not worth mentioning. Nuff said. If I don't stop now, I might bore people, so I'll stop—**3524 Tilden Ave., Los Angeles 34, Calif.**

So you too have turned Angeleno, Miss Randolph. The move does not seem to have materially affected your literary (?!) style. Remember to wear your woollies when venturing out after dark in that climate. And if all long skirts were like those on Bergey's creation for the January cover, we should have no objections whatever to the fashion leadership of *Monsieur* Christian Dior and his Parisian followers—no objection whatsoever!

Come to think of it, Hamilton did wreck a few worlds in the HoF classic in question. Well, he's the lad who can do it.

WHERE'S ROBYN LE ROY?
by Dan Mulcahy

Dear Editor: I started out to write a hack letter, but, on considering what a dismal failure it was and what a small chance it had of getting printed, I tore it up and started on a new one.

I am very bored by writers who devote their whole letter to a minute analysis of each and every story. Suffice it to say that this issue could have been better, and that a certain short near the back of the book belonged somewhere else . . . exactly where, I won't say.

Bergey's cover was nicely done and it showed more effort than most of his covers, but it didn't appeal to me for some reason. It has always been my ambition to see a Bergey inside illustration . . . as you know, there can be a lot of difference between an artist's cover and his inside work.

By the way, whatever happened to the illustrator of RED SUN OF DANGER, VALLEY OF THE FLAME, THE DISCIPLINARY CIRCUIT and many others (I think it was the same artist on all three, though the work is unsigned)? He had talent and his art was

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usually good . . . at any rate, superior to most of the artists you have at present. Just for my own information, what is his name? And if there's any chance of getting him back, I wish you'd try to do so.

I think that'll be enough about the art work and now let's change the subject. As for the features:

S. F. Fan Publications (why that highbrow title?) was super-excellent, as usual. The only way it could be improved would be to devote more space to it. At present, it's getting a little over two full pages. If you could increase it to, say, five pages, giving an enlarged synopsis of, at least, the fanzines on the A-list, you would make the feature that much more interesting.

I have a suggestion: Why not put in a feature, as a companion to SFFP, written every month by a different fan from a different section of the country, reporting on the current fanactivities of his region. This feature, if properly handled, could prove very interesting. No space, you say? Well, I don't think many readers would gripe if you cut out one story (short) to make space for this enlarged SFFP and the new feature. Please give this suggestion some thought. I think it could be really successful.

Turning to TEV, we find a crop of letters vastly improved since last time. This Lovecraft controversy gets better all the time. Nothing like a good controversy to liven up a letter column, I always say. I agree with Burgess concerning Merritt. I don't read his stories too often, but even when I do get around to one I seldom have the courage to finish it. Oh well, maybe I just don't appreciate literature.

Note to Peter Tappan: How can anyone who appreciates Lovecraft ask for the return of Captain Future? The two just don't go together together. If the publishers ever get enough paper, I hope they'll use it to make TWS and SS go monthly, rather than revive CF.

Since this epistle seems to have gone a bit over two pages, I'd better close now. And don't you dare put this anywhere near Robyn le Roy's letter!—**4170 Utah St., St. Louis, 16, Mo.**

Le Roy is unaccountably missing this issue, so you can sit back and relax. We give you machine-tooled poetaster, William E. Rose of Beaumont, Texas, as a substitute neighbor. The illustrator whose loss you mourn is Wilbur Thomas. He has progressed to advertising fields so lucrative his return to these pages is highly problematical—darn the luck! A very good man indeed.

Your fan suggestion is interesting—but the fan-organization registration we hope to inaugurate in our July issue (fan co-operation wotting) is a step along the very line you suggest. It is our hope that such listing—perhaps with some comment—will enable no-fan readers to locate their nearest group as well as promote exchange of letters and visits between groups. So, if you are an officer of such an organization or wish to start one, please inform us, complete with address and membership listing. We'll do the rest.

WHEN VERBIAGE IS GARBIAGE
by W. E. Rose

Dear Editor: In Re your load of metrical verbiage in January S.S., will reply:

Your scanscion was far above average, your jargon was better than par,

Yet Thalia she fainted in terror, obscuring fair Calliopes' star,

Polymnia you ignored completely, poor Clio threw in the sponge,

As you tramped on Urania's mantle, and splashed like a spent muskelunge

In a thersitical sea of juiced pickles, fresh plucked from the slopes af Altair,

Preserved from freezing on Pluto, immune to Mercury's volatile air.

But you have forced recognition, of that object that graces your hat,

That solid and sound polyhedron, which is oval or oblong or flat

Or covered with growth polytrichous, or bald as a skull from a ghat.

You are plenty darned good at expression, your language is trite monoglot,

I like it, Friend Saturn, ex-sargeant, I enjoy it a heck-of-a-lot!—**P. O. Box 430, Beaumont, Texas.**

Last issue, last issue, last issue! The critical hyenas howl
As they rend editorial tissue, or seeking some more go aprowl.
Old blunders, most haply forgotten, they turn up in full light of day
Old paragraphs ragged and rotten, they lovingly up and display.
That such trivia's safely been buried is a fact of which they're unaware,
And if Ye Ed. is already harried, they utter a blithe, "We don't care."
So if we had our way we would send them, to desert-land in the Southwest
In an Army V-2 we'd up-end them, with a triplicate-written request.
To ship them so far from the System, they'd never, no never, get back.
To learn with what fervor we'd hissed 'em and their horrible letters of hack.

Oh, well, it's all in fun—or is it?

KELLERCON
by Cynthia Carey

Dear Sir: May I please reply to the letter of Tom Jewett in the November issue in re "Life Detour" by Doctor David H. Keller.

It is pre-eminent that each of us has the right to declare ourselves pro or con any given topic but that right is not license to descend to vulgarity or abuse for good manners and breeding frown upon such tactics. Also one admits to mental and vocabular poverty when he finds himself unable to express an idea in other than acceptable terms.

Mr. Jewett declares, with evident hyper-superiority, "I don't see what Keller had to offer that the fans rave about." Immature, indeed, for while, for the sake of argumnt, we will admit that "Life Detour" is not the best of the Kelleryarns, it is, nevertheless, a good story and has the implicit Keller lesson in human reactions.

However, "The Boneless Horror", the only other story **Startling** printed, (Nov., '41) is replete with true science (which provided the basis for experiments in longevity by Dr. Thomas Gardner); real and factual knowledge of mythology and history and above all, a vivid picture of human avarice, hate and a steady build-up of horror.

Ben Abramson has declared that "Unlocking The Past" made such an impression on his that for weeks he could think of little else. Dr. Elwood C. Nance, Pres. of Tampa University, has said that he has received more inspiration and understanding from the Keller stories than from many a learned sermon and treatise; E. E. Evans of Los Angeles told how he had re-read "Life Everlasting" some dozen times and each time had found something new to think about. T. O'Connor Sloan repeatedly stated that "Keller has something no other writer gives, a humanitarian understanding and full knowledge of people as they really live." We could go on and on but let this suffice for quotations.

Doctor Keller brings to his stories a new plot with varying developments—no rote and rule stuff or re-write of the same thing—well grounded science and medical knowledge; a tremendous understanding of the human mind in

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all its intricacies; an almost inexhaustible fund of mythology and Biblical history, all told in the everyday language of the everyday person, not in Latin or complicated phrases, which no one can understand. His horror is more horrible for it is logical, possible and often founded in fact. Older fans love the Kelleryarns for the foregoing reasons and because of his intense humanitarianism. Newer fans, if they are willing to think, will find much in his work. "Taine of San Francisco" is the mildest of men, a true detective, a fine scientist and is loved by all who have read him. A lovable character.—**Chatham, New Jersey.**

This is one controversy in which the Editor does not intend to take sides—especially in view of the impressive documentation Miss Carey musters to her support. As a matter of fact, we agree with her regarding Colonel Keller on almost every count. He has been and is a major force in stf.

DOWN ON HANK
by Vernon D. Hodges

Dear Editor: I've always know that ultimately I would write you a letter. And here it is. "The Blue Flamingo" is an excellent little tale, written by a very polished writer. But I certainly hope that it is the beginning of a larger story, for "The Flamingo" is not complete, though a perfect prelude to some grander work. The ground-work for a sequel is obviously there: the clans of the lower world, the mysterious phrase. I shall be looking forward to a sequel soon.

And now to the Merritt-Kuttner controversy. To me it is inconceivable how any serious reader can actually prefer Kuttner to Merritt. For myself, Merritt typifies fantasy and I am now convinced (since Kuttner's recent blossoming) that no one shall ever usurp him of that honor.

Because "Dark World" seems to be Hank's initial claim to Lord of Fantasy, I shall use it as the primary example.

When I picked up "Dark World" with the purpose of reading, I did so with no preconceived prejudice, as, I am afraid, some of the other Merritt defenders did. In fact, I entered into the things with quite a cheerful attitude of expectancy. It was long my opinion and hope that someone should replace Merritt since his pen is now stilled. I thought what fantasy needed was another Merritt and I was in hopes that Kuttner was the man.

I am grateful to "Dark World" for one thing: it proved to my satisfaction that Merritt is Merritt and no one can equal him in his style.

Kuttner falls shy of the mark for various reasons. First, his characterizations. Compare Lur, the witch of "Dwellers in the Mirage" to the "Dark World's" witch. Which is the stronger character? Compare the psychological struggle between Leif and Dwayanu to that which ensued between Bond and Ganelon. Which was more powerful? Merritt's struggle even surpassed that of Jekyll and Hyde.

The the style of writing. Abe Merritt's contains the polished prose-poetry that every writer strives for, which, however, seems to be falling into disuse. Modernists claim the more elliptic a writer is the better he is, and so the modern writer's works are mainly histories with metaphors. Merritt's writings are beautiful and flawless as gems. His adjectives are effective to say the least. Also he wrote slowly and carefully, refusing to be rushed. Kuttner's style is that of a pulp-action writer with ideas.

Take now the situations. Which combat was greater—*Leif's with Khalk'ru or Ganelon's with Llyr?*

"The Dwellers" is the greatest fantasy story yet written. I have read "The Dwellers" (the story that Kuttner rewrote) three times and expect to read it three times more. I shall never reread "Dark World", for I prefer the original. An imitation can never carry that fresh indefinable something which is found in the original.

However, don't get me wrong—"Dark World" was a good story. It couldn't help being a good story with the idea it held.

When Kuttner uses his own ideas he is excellent. Take for instance his current "The Power and the Glory"; this is a swell story, and is also fairly original. Keep him that way.

Still, I appreciate the effort on the part of the **Startling** editor. It indicates that there is a real effort taking place to bring S.S. out of the slump that it fell into during the war. Consequently, Startling is going up, up, up in quality.—**c/o Santa Fe RR Station. Hanford. California.**

Thanks muchly for the general opinion of current progress in SS. We're trying. But the Kuttner-Merritt controversy eludes us completely. As you say, Hank writes his stuff, as Merritt wrote his own. Actually, under analysis, the differences are highly marked with neither a necessary loser.

Your views upon this subject, Mr. Hodges, remain, of course, yours alone. But isn't it possible, in their expression, you could use a change of didactics?

ESSENCE D'GOAT
by Eadie T. Smith

Dear Editor: What do they do with people like Wally Weber *Doesn't he know that others are entitled to their* own free opinions? Perhaps he had better return to school and learn all over again. The letters are printed in THE ETHER VIBRATES so that your readers can compare their ideas and for you to discover what improvements need to be made. I don't think you need improvements (just an opinion—**why, thanks, Eadie—ED.**).

Mr. Weber could stand a going-over himself. What's written are **his** own opinions. He's a critic and a critic is a wet blanket that soaks everything that it touches.

I miss Rick Sneary. I like him even if he does let an insult slip once in a while. I like Jerri Bullock and B. Lee Randolph too. Did Rick Sneary ever tell anyone what he looks like? I dreamt about him once. Actually it was two dreams (double feature night). I didn't see his face because he was hopping about on a pogo stick.

I love Robyn Le Roy's style of writing (opinon). I could never learn to spell the way he does **(praise, Allah—ED.)**. Such finesse, such artistry!

I have two questions. One—what is a John Van Couvering? Two—do you like my cologne (it's called Essence D'Goat)?—**2405 Seventh Street, Santa Monica, California.**

All right, Eadie, how *does* a goat smell without any nose? This seems to be our time with the lunatic fringe. We'll let Sneary and Van Couvering speak for themselves, John.

NEVER COUNT SHEEP
by Linda Blake

Dear Ed: Bergey seems to have put on a fairly good cover again although it wasn't as good as his last one for TWS. Who did the illustrations for FLAMINGO? Very good! The rest of the inside pics were good also.

I was very disappointed with the HoF this ish. It reminded me too much of high school days and history class. Pfui!

As usual, St. Clair was good but not as good as in other stories. Excuse please—I take that statement back. ALEPH SUB ONE was a good tale.

THE BLUE FLAMINGO was a swell yarn and this gal has no gripe about it.

ULTRA EVOLUTION was—well, something was lacking or so it seemed to me.

GUARANTEED had one of those surprise endings and rates a good hearty laugh. I really enjoyed it.

That's all for this ish except—please, ED., could you print one of my letters? I'm a new fan trying to worm my way into fan circles.—**635 Schifferdecker Avenue, Joplin, Missouri.**

P.S. Wigodsky is slowly driving me batty. First he says he's eleven. Now, in one part of his letter in the January ish, he's twelve. In still another place he says he's read stf for thirty years. MIKE, MAKE UP YOUR MIND! Is he twelve or forty? He sounds too intelligent for twelve and too stupid for forty.

You femme fans are out in force this ish—pardon, issue, bless you! As for Wigodsky's

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age, do you really care? We'd never have believed it, never. Seriously, Linda, here's luck with your fanactivities.

OH, HAPPY DAY!
by Don Day

Dear Editor: I think the cover of the January STARTLING is one of the best and most effective that has ever appeared on a fantasy magazine. It is to be hoped that the Blue Flamingo cover and the one on the December THRILLING WONDER are an indication that the BIM, BEM, BABE trio have passed into the limbo that has swallowed Sgt. Saturn.

From there it is just a step to "The Blue Flamingo" where the attention is arrested by (I preume "Stevens' ") magnificent illustrations. At the risk of seeming repetitious, I'll go overboard and say they are superlative and the one on page 19, one of the finest you've ever had.

As for the story, Bok has told Merritt's favorite story again and done it well. His stories are frequently what his art never is, derivative, but on either, he always does a good workmanlike job. On the whole, "The Blue Flamingo" was well above par.

Next: "Aleph Snb One". Discussions in the Portland S-F Society have revealed that, as with Keller, readers either think Margaret St. Clair is wonderful or they can't stand her. I happen to like her stories and find the change of pace welcome.

Hamilton's novelet was well worth the reprinting tho I had read it when it appeared originally, so the edge was somewhat taken off for me.

"Ultra Evolution" is not up to your current standards. It is a good enough story, but "Cross" can and will write much better stuff if you insist on it.

Finally, EEEvans has turned out a neat little gem in "Guaranteed". It is rarely that one sees a well done story so short, in the stf field.

Not much comment on TEV and the Fanzine column, except that I liked the letter column better with fewer and longer letters and I can't figure how TYMPANI got listed down among the "Bs".

On the whole an excellent issue. I sincerely hope the last few issues are an indication of what we can expect in the future.—**3435, Northeast 38 Avenue, Portland 13, Oregon.**

We dunno about TYMPANI, but it is improving too. Othewise, no comment on a highly flattering epistle—with one belated exception. Why on earth you fans insist on calling illustrator Stevens, Lawrence when you know the latter is not his name we shall never figure. Perhaps it was and/or is a pseudonym but never so far as we know in these pages.

The fellow's name is STEVENS and we don't like contemptuous quotes. He is however, a great pen-and-ink man under either name.

BASIC IMMATURITY
by Les and Es Cole

Dear Sir: The shorts this trip were far better than average. Evans' "Guaranteed" was tops in that department.

I have a long-standing prejudice against women science-fiction writers. However, St. Clair's "Aleph Sub One" was her best effort to date. A few comments, tho. That tesseract! (Once defined for me as "a hyperspatial cube all faces of which are cubes coexistant in space but not in time and expressed by the formula V-a⁴") I'D like to have one in my closet! Another thing: perhaps I missed her point, but I thought that the basic arithmetic operations were inapplicable in dealing with transfinites: e.g., $aleph_0$ times $aleph_0 = aleph_0$; or, $aleph_0 + aleph_0 = aleph_0$. The only way out of this squirrel cage is $aleph_0$ to the $aleph_0$ power which results in C spoken of as the noncountable class of real numbers (and which may be identical with aleph sub one).

"Conquest of Two Worlds" was quite putrid. But then, Hamilton always was an imperialist.

"The Blue Flamingo" was all right, I suppose. I just don't care for the type. So Bok thinks the shifting of the Earth's axis caused the "Glacial Age"? What caused the seven successive glacial maxima? Seven successive atom bombs?

A sad and sentimental tear was brought to my eye as I pursued Michael Wigodsky's latest. I was just about his age when I began writing letters to editors.

Mike suffers from the same inferiority I felt—and he reacts in similar fashion. F'rinstance, of all the letters in the January issue, his contained the largest number of cutting remarks.

You aren't being particularly funny, Mike, when you comment that leRoy is odious or that Burgess is awful. Cutting, in the absence of criticism, is only an indication of a basic immaturity—a failing to which we all are occasionally subject.

Incidentally, M.W., equation may be defined as "the process or act of making equal". I can equate any abstraction to another all dependent upon the system I'm using and if its elements are defined and consistently used.

Lin Carter: Ye Gods, Lin, do you judge authors on the basis of their popularity? Fess up—you're beggin' the question.

Does anyone know what happened to the man who signed his letters Carl H. Anderson? I personally believe he was the greatest letter hack who ever submitted material. And what about the feller who first gave the world the BEM—one Martin Alger (who founded the SFTPOBEMOTCOSFP).

I'd better stop—this has gone on too long now. But I have one last suggestion. Seems to me a lot of controversy could be avoided if we had a standard definition of the terms "science-fiction" and "fantasy". For instance, I don't believe "The Blue Flamingo" may be considered science-fiction. How about it? Anyone got any ideas?—**2903 Grove St., Berkeley 3, California.**

Well, we have several, as well as alepho-ants in our you-know-whats. As for the tesseract (which still sounds to us like a naughty word), remember that this happened in the *future* and was quite remarkable for even that hallowed time.

You can have your old equations. Personally we prefer double-crostics since we had a losing tussle with second-year alegebra at Andover and had to take a re-exam more years ago than we like to think about.

Furthermore, ergo and irregardless, we are delighted to have someone come forward with the origin of BEM. Was Martin Alger any relation to Horatio—or to the obese gentleman of similar nomenclature who officiated as Secretary of War during our dysentery duel with Spain back in 1898?

One final request—please further define SFTPOBEMOTCOSP. If it's unprintable, okay, but we like to know for our private files. For your ideas about that poor old FLAMINGO, you might refer yourself back to Paul (not Carl H.) Anderson, whose letter occupies the opening slot.

KIRSCHNICKER
by Joe Kirschnick

Dearest Ed: Tsk, tsk, what a character you made of me in the January issue of Ye Ole Startling! Now the

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whole world knows of my innermost feelings. Oh well, it takes all kind to make a world.

Ah, that cover! And to think, there's those that beg for space-ships. Egads, what's happening to this mag? Bergey starts scribbling beootiful covers, and in the same ish you have Bok and Hamilton and Evans. Speaking of Evans, I'd love to read a condensed and abridged copy of **Guaranteed.**

Now this Merritt-Lovecraft business. Tho' I don't care too much for Fantasy, I scraped my scarce pence together and bought a bruised and battered copy of **The Shadow out of Time** by H. P. and **Creep, Shadow, Creep** by Abe. (I was seeing shadows for a week) Personally, I think Abraham wins by 99 and 44/100 lengths. After reading the "Creep" I had goosepimples galore for a month whereas "The Shadow Out of Time" left me lost amidst the adjectives.

As it seems to be the trend to address the fen personally in the letters. . . .

Billie Lee. I have a slightly used bucket of decimal points which I highly recommend you to, likewise, dunk your head in. Maybe I can take an asprin, grin and bear it when you commend Bergey . . . maybe I can grit my teeth and give a feeble smile when you praise (ugh!) Marchioni, but please . . . PLEASE write no more poetry.

Ben. Gasp.—Another one. Ye Ed ought to add a department on the metrical structure of verse

Robyn. 3 cherz

Michael. I knew another chap that was born on a February 29th. Poor guy got shot by his wife at the tender age of nine.

Gene A. We're not on . . . ahem . . . speaking terms.

S. Vernon. And if our past is our future, when we go to the fortune teller's, we get jipped, because when she tells us our future and our past, she's really telling us our past and our future. I prefer stripes.

I leave with this thot to dwell in your minds. Maybe the entire (and I mean entire) universe was formed by a planet, that was infinetely large in comparison to ours, that exploded. Where did the planet come from in the first place. . . . The same place that space came from in the first place. WHERE . . . WHERE . . . WHERE???

—4018 Colborne Rd., Baltimore 29, Maryland.

For an abridged edition of E. E. Evans' GUARANTEED in four morocco-bound volumes, send $5432.93 (stamps acceptable) to Forrest J. Ackerman, Esq., 236½ North New Hampshire, Hollywood 4, California. The edition is strictly limited to 2,000,000 copies.

BLUNTLY INSTRUMENT
by Lin Carter

Dear Sir: So it giffs **Startling** again. And a pretty good issue, too. For which, thanks. Keep 'em coming like you have been, chum, and I, at least, will be satisfied.

Cover: No good, I'm sorry to say. Too stiff, posed, and the like. I could think of a dozen scenes in the novel that would have made better covers—when they saw the stairway in the pool; when they first saw the blue flamingo; when Hibbert and Mareth were racing thru the Living Forest—oh, any number of scenes.

So be it.

As for **The Blue Flamingo,** it was a beautiful story, in places comparable to Abe Merritt. Wonderful descriptions. "The water was incredibly blue and coated with a metallic sheen. Not a ripple marred its surface. It might have been brilliant glass of cobalt dusted with atoms of amethyst" . . .

That is great stuff. The story is lacking on two points, tho. Length and characterization. And by the way, it really screams for a sequel.

Hmmmmm?

Tho I have a sneaking admiration for Ed Hamilton, **Conquest** wasn't so hot. Too much action in too short a story. It was just too condensed. A wonderful ending and moral, tho, which save it from the literary trashcan.

Aleph Sub One was entirely pointless and plotless. Mrs. St. Clair has, can and should turn out more readable stuff than this.

The other shorts were surprisingly good. Evans' story was a scream! If he can turn out stuff like this, get more! Never knew Tripoli had it in him.

Weber's letter leads one on a rather interesting train of thought. I never realized it, but the letter section is uninteresting! Lotsa jerks all commenting on the same stories, when nobody gives a darn what they think, anyway! A few of them howsoever (and I like to think of myself in this category) try to present their letters in as individual and interesting a way as possible—witness Robyn leRoy, William Rose, Clements and others in this ish. But since you cut all this funny stuff from the column, the number of ways we can present our 'umble missives is strictly limited. Which ain't so good.

As for the next issue, it looks darn good. **One Of Three** seems like a tremendous yarn, at least the plot seems to have scope—I just hope Long can handle it sufficiently. Will be glad to see another Weinbaum reprint. Can't recall if I've read this one or not, so I'll be looking for it.—**1734 Newark St. So., St. Petersburg, Fla.**

If you lads and lassies have trouble coming up with an occasional idea for a fan letter with grulzaks twice removed, how about Ye Ed's problems? Each and every month, what with the two magazines, he has to come up with an editorial topic worthy of leading off the department for blurbs and readers. Frankly, in view of the scope given him, he has not yet found it a back or brain-breaking chore.

So, given as readers even greater scope, what's so tough about keeping the story reviews short and employing your letter to express an occasional thought? That, dear Linseed, was the basic idea behind cutting out the grulzaks and creaky hacktraditional tales of journeys to the newsstand to purchase the mag.

If an opinion of a story or picture or anything else in the magazine is the springboard for an idea, then go ahead and hit it hard. Otherwise, let an idea or opinion dribble onto the stationery and let us have it. Can do?

OH-OH!
by Joe Schaumburger

Dear Sir:

I

So you think you're a poet?
Good.
You have met your match.
Me.
You can rhyme "eerie" with "beery"
But can you write blank verse?
Nah!!!!

II

A few words about the Jan. ish:
Swell!
Bok can write.
Hamilton can write.
St. Clair and Polton Cross can write.
But they don't write like Evans.
EVANS IS TERRIFIC!!!!!!
EVANS IS MARVELOUS!!!!!!
He's good.
We want more Evans.
We want more Evans.
We want more Evans.
Please.

III

The Ether Vibrates:
Ward is on the beam.
So is Burgess.
And Van Couvering.
Wigodsky, too.
Tell me:
Don't you think the beam is getting a little crowded?

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The Cover!
Slurp.

V

YOU DID'T REVIEW MY FANZINE!
&%$#$**@ you.
Otherwise, it was all right.

VI

The letters again:
There was no letter from Slavin.
Good.
I dislike Slavin.
THERE WERE NO LETTERS FROM SNEARY AND KENNEDY.
You will be hung at dawn.
Sob.
Boo-hoo.

VII

The pic on page 15:
Superb.
Can I have it?
Please.

VIII

Farewell.
I will be back.
Au revoir.

—1822 Bathgate Ave., Bronx 57, New York.

So you, my eerie, beery bee
Express a craving to play a blankety blank verse match game with I
(You will note to what Shapespearean parsecs
This alleged doggerologist
Is willing to proceed
To avoid
Even the faintest semblance of a rhyme.)
Nevertheless, heretofore and irregardless,
And with accord to all due procedure and protocol,
You will be the proud recipient
Of an answer in kind—
Or is unkind a more appropriate hunk of etymology,
Or is it entymology?
Whenever we try to distinguish betwixt them
All we can think of is poliomyelitis,
Which is a disease.
One of the two mean words
The other bugs,
That's us.
Howe'er, since this digression grows
Tedious,
Your answer, Shambungle—
Pfui! Phui! Pfui!

OUR FRIEND OONA
by Edith Goldsworthy

Mr. Editor: (Very formal since I am registering a complaint) What do you mean "a complete novel"—THE BLUE FLAMINGO It very definitely was not complete. You can tell Bok I said so. Most disgusting—Hibbert is thrust out of Khoire to hunt for a secret cult with the face and form of a known criminal (Scarlatti) and a few magic words that Mareth managed to whisper in his ear.

I want to know how he found the secret cult and how he got back to Mareth. I've read the first half of this novel. How about the other half—yes? I feel cheated. Bet you got a lot of letters on this subject **(Sic, ED.)**. Does Bok have a sequel in writing?

CONQUEST OF TWO WORLDS was something to think about—and I thought and agree with Halkett. As for Oona of ALEPH SUB ONE—she sounds like "My Friend Irma". ULTRA EVOLUTION is too far in the future for me to bother about.

That GUARANTEED was a lulu. I have a notion to cut it out and send it to a certain you-know-who. It would be a rare snicker if such a thing could happen. Well—how about the other half of THE BLUE FLAMINGO?. And who did the illustrations?—**29 Navy Street, Venice, California.**

Sorry, Edith, but we haven't heard anything from Bok about a sequel to THE BLUE FLAMINGO. But perhaps you fans will prime his pump for him. You're so right about our getting a lot of letters expressing the desire for a sequel. Vern Stevens did the illustrations.

ALL HOLLOWS
by John Van Couvering

Mine friend: When I was young and untainted by the ennui which is the ordinary fan's much-lamented lot, I plunged headlong into the stories, devouring them every one with not a growl from my pancreatic (in them days every plot was new). But now, as my head bends under the weight of graying locks, I tremblingly fumble, with gnarled and palsied hands, among corn sufferers, false teeth wearers and romances of other lands until I at last behold through rheumy eyes the glory that was Greece (and—ahem—the splendor that was rheum). . . . THE ETHER VIBRATES!

To dispense with the conventional corn and to get to the rather dull point (there's another one! Jack Benny, here I come!) there are several letters I wish to answer, comment upon and perhaps even read if I get the time. After all, I was mentioned at least five times, if I do say so my fat greasy little self.

Jerri Bullock mentions a book by ERB where the Earth was hollow and there was a sun inside. You mentioned you hadn't read it, and wondered how in the name of Klono's Brass Bellybutton could a sun be inside the Earth. Now, list to me, for I have much wisdom in my pointed little skull, and I shall attempt to set you right.

In the first place, the book is TARZAN AT THE EARTH'S CORE. It was preceded by two others, AT THE EARTH'S CORE and PELLUCIDAR. After it came at least one more, TANAR OF PELLUCIDAR. All these are written of a land where the horizon is a-risin' toward the sky, the sun never sets and various misplaced monsters gallop about, devouring all and sundry and furnishing a fitting foe for the son of Kala the she-ape, with his thin veneer of civilization over a perfectly beastly core. The sun is (I suppose) a mass of disintegrating radioactives suspended in the center of the hollow space by gravitic whatnot. There, now you know.

Wally Weber definitely is right. Interesting letters people read. Letters like mine, phooey. Also, Wigodsky, the Master of the Minimum Missive, has suddenly contracted either a typer or an overpowering desire to see how long it takes the ink in his ball-point pen to run out.

Fanzine Review: May I quote you, old chum? "SINE NOMEN—John Van Couvering—**strictly for the kiddies—**" !!! ??-? &&& ###% % !! How do you expect anyone to sub if you defame me like that? I'LL SUE!! After all, it's strictly for the kicks, not the kiddies. I have no desire to burn myself out trying to put out a three-hundred-page index of every s-f yarn printed just as an added attraction.

Who wants to be a stuffed shirt with his ego (like the proverbial chip) on his shoulder, going to conventions, writing long windy ego-boo on the probability of s-f authors going communist or the history of Emil Schlutzengut's ill-fated one-shot (printed in 1935), SAUERKRAUT UND JET PROPULSION? I don't.

All right, all right, you were just criticizing. But wait until #3 gets to you, old buddy. You'll break the rule about no profanity in print.

Hannes is Bok, huh? Well, it's a good yarn, if a bad pun. . . . **Conquest of Two Worlds** quite good. . . . Glad to see EEE finally broke into print (Guaranteed) even if

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it was only a page long. Let's have more of these cute little shorts.—**10358 South Downey, Downey California.**

Thanks for the core-ny information (Brother, my gas mask!). La Bullock—and isn't that a fine name for a dainty feminine creature!—follows with more of same.

So you can't take it, huh, bub? Well, we're sharpening our typewriter for issue #3 of your fanzine—even considering creating a Z list. So send it on. We're reading.

JERRI-MIAD
by Jerri Bullock

Dear Ed: Before I make comment on the January issue of STARTLING, let me answer the question you asked me in TEV. For the life of me, I don't know how E. R. Burroughs ever finagled the sun into the inner World, but so help me, he did it. Incidentally, I received a fen letter from one Paul Frey who informed me the book's title was "Tarzan at The Earth's Core" and that it was one of the "Pellucidar" series, as the inner core is called. (Yeh?)

Mr. Frey also said he was a bit disgruntled over the fact I used the abbreviation "ish" for issue. Doesn't he know it saves space?

Now to get down to the "Orchids and Onions" dept. May I shake your hand, Mr. Editor? I have not a complaint to make, and only one mild criticism of the Jan. ish. All the stories were well written, entertaining and contained wonderful plots and characterizations. Yet, didn't it seem to you the stories on a whole were fantasy and not science-fiction? Hm? I like that just as well as s-f when it's good material; but I thought S and TWS went in more for the latter. (Slit my throat if I'm wrong.)

I have to pick a soup-bone with you. In my last printed letter I blew my top about your crummy short stories. (Tubby mainly.) So what did you do? You proceeded to print wonderful shorts, and when I wrote in an apology you scrapped it and let people go right on thinking I was a heel. Now is that nice?

Can I get in on several of the feuds going on before I close? 1. I think Kuttner is a much better fantasy writer than stf; but it's a toss-up between which I like best. 2. Bud Gregory is very entertaining, but you must admit Fitzgerald is no scientist. He gets his molecules mixed up. 3. HPL stories remind me of eating a loaf of stale bread with no butter. 4. Merritt was definitely a good writer, but he should've stuck to ghost stories. 5. Cap Future wouldn't make a come-back in book form; but he might do alright in a two-page cartoon strip in TWS.—**22200 Lemon Ave., Hayward, Calif.**

My dear Miss Lemon—Pardon, Jerri—you seem to have a fine flair for slitting your own throat which saves us the trouble. But thanks, anyway for Pellucidating on Inside Tarzan. And we're awfully, awfully sorry we made a heel out of you—that is if you're sure it was us (or is it we?).

LOWER CASE
by jack clements

dear ed: the january issue of good old SS has bitten the dust, and now come the inevitable expression of opinion.

"the blue flamingo" was one of the finest fantasies that has come along in many a moon. the style was wonderful, and characterization and plotting were superb. it was way to short for me thought I was so completely absorbed in the yarn that it COULDN'T have been long enough. it was one of the few yarns that made me really get in the mood of the story situation. no doubt the all-out-for-science boys will find fault with it, but then you can't please everybody.

"conquest of two worlds" was a little too dated in style, but it was still enjoyable. hamilton is writing much better these days, I think. but if all hoffers are as good as this, I'll be satisfied. at any rate, they should all be at least as long as this one, unless they are of the superior short type that weinbaum handled so well.

the st. clair offering was, as usual, excellent. that gal gets better every time, though she has done some crud for other zines.

"ultra evolution" was a fine yarn from one of my favorite authors. the illustration for the story by astarita was excellent.

"guaranteed" would have seemed corny even for a fanzine, let alone SS. but it DID fill up that extra space.

stevens' artwork was the best he (or anyone else) has done in a long long time. especially the one for page 15. man, that's real beauty.

TEV was pretty good this time, though not up to last ish.

i back up rex ward's plea that the sneary blasters keep their big traps shut. rick is one of the best letter hacks in the business, though his mispelling is NOT intentional.

billie randolph's letter was the usual fem stuff; gushy writing, reversed opinions, poor poetry. Tell me, billie, why don't you and your feminine friends take up knitting or something, instead of writing the pro's. it would be much easier on all of us. think it over, huh?

most interesting thing in the thomas and corporal potts letters was the typographical mix-up. proof-reader have a strong union or something?

robyn le roy is quaint indeed, even funny now and then. at least he keeps his phonetics fairly consistent.

wigodsky must have been taking vitamin pills. now, instead of saying nothing in five lines, he says nothing in 50. is that good? but thanks for letting me have george o. smith, mike. just what I've always wanted!

obviously wally weber is hoping to find his name the subject of discussion as most letter-hack blasters are. well, i guess he'll get what he's after.

but if yo're really interested in seeing more interesting letters in TEV, why not try writing one, eh?

jerri bullock: see comment on randolph letter.

marion zimmer: knit one, purl two.

the editorial comments at the beginning of TEV were interesting. again the limits of stfantasy were brought up. kerkhoff objected to the kuttner treatment of time and space. actually, I don't see how we could say the time passage in "lands of the earthquake" was so fantastic, considering that all our ideas on time are extremely vague, considering that we don't actually know what time is. it is those odd treatments that have caused the kuttner yarns to be classed as "fantasies", simply because they did not follow usual stf confines. personally, i don't think stf HAS any confines, excepting, of course, mathematical fallacies or mistakes in scientific facts. but as far as THEORIES go, there can be no limit.

some people say fantasy is stf with all barriers removed. i don't think this statement is accurate. in the first place, what is the difference between stf and fantasy. a ghost story is usually called fantasy, but wouldn't life after death be a scientific phenomena, since death is something we know nothing about? life after death is just as stfictional as life on other worlds. for the same line of reasoning follows: a writer imagines life on other worlds. while he has nothing to work on as far as factual basis goes, he cannot be proven wrong. he is merely using his imagination to express what he feels "might be". in a ghost story, the author is doing the same thing; he is imagining life after death, and again he cannot be proven wrong.

the borderline between stf and fatnsay is almost nonexistant in my book. anybody else got anything to say on the subject.—**6310 madison rd., cincinnati 27, ohio.**

As we've already expressed ourselves on fantasy vs stf, we'll leave the matter to the fans, jack. For the rest, we're sitting back and letting the femme fans rend you to bits—which is, we suspect cynically, what you have in mind in assailing them so dourly. Next, please—

FURTHER PELLUCIDATION
by John Harwood

Dear Editor: The story I liked best in the January issue of SS was Edmond Hamilton's "The Conquest of Two

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Worlds." This type of science fiction is more believable than the fantastic school of time travel, fourth dimension and other improbable if not impossible sciences.

Although interplanetary travel is not yet a proven possibility the scientists are at work on the first steps of it. Take the rocket research at the White Sands Proving Grounds. Science has already discovered facts about the higher levels of our atmosphere that have changed many of the theories that were almost taken to be facts.

The next best was the lead novel by Hannes Bok, "The Blue Flamingo." I do like some fantasy—as I stated before I prefer your other class of stories. But fantasy can be interesting even when you know that the action taking place is impossible.

Of the short stories I liked "Ultra Evolution" by Polton Cross best and "Guaranteed" by E. Everett Evans the least. This last was only an overwritten joke.

There was a reference in one of the letters in this month's issue about an anthology (if that's the word for a collection of stories by one author) of Charteris stories. If you and Jack Clements were talking about the Saint stories of Leslie Charteris I would like to know the name of the book. I don't remember any recent books of short stories of the Saint which contained any science fiction or fantasy. The only such stories that I have read have appeared in TWS.

There is only one exception that I can think of in any of the books. That is the story entitled, "The Man Who Liked Ants," which appeared in "The Happy Highwayman." In case you don't remember it, the story dealt with the Saint's adventures with the professor who bred ants until they reached the size of dogs.

As I am a Burroughs fan I was interested to note that there was a mention of ERB in the letters of Lin Carter and Jerri Bullock. For your information, the name of the story referred to in the latter letter was "Tarzan at the Earth's Core." I don't remember anything about the sun rising in the West and setting in the East.

According to ERB in the Pellucidar series, the sun is motionless and is stationed directly overhead all the time. Maybe "time" isn't the right word to use because for the reason that the sun is always at zenith there is no way of measuring time, thus there is no time in Pellucidar.

You wanted to know how Burroughs got a sun inside the Earth. According to the author, when the Earth was in its formative period it consisted of a mass of hot gases which upon cooling contracted and the cooler material formed a crust on the outside of the mass. As this revolving, contracting and cooling mass became still cooler the solid particles were flung by the centrifugal force toward the inner surface of the crust.

After the crust was formed, the hot gasses contracted still more and were held by centripetal force equally distant from all parts of the inside of the crust. Thus, the sun inside the Earth. There's an answer to your question.

Here's another problem for you. Not only does ERB have a sun inside the Earth but he also has a small planet which revolves between the sun and the surface of Pellucidar. I don't remember the answer to that one.

In the section of fanzine reviews I noticed that you had review of "The Burroughs Bulletin." In it you say that Tigrina's article about Burroughs is "the most completely naive interview we have ever read." I have a copy of the issue you mention and I think you may have overlooked a small item in connection with the interview. The editor states that the article was originally intended for a teen-age publication which folded before the story could be published so that may account somewhat for what you call a "naive interview."—**73 Rounds St., New Bedford, Mass.**

You could be right about Tigrina's ERB interview—but intentionally or not it *was* naive. Re the Charteris anthology, it was put out in paper covers by Charteris-Bond some years ago and was *not* a collection of Saint stories. It was entitled THE SAINT'S CHOICE IN SCIENCE FICTION STORIES or something approximately like it and contained entirely yarns from this magazine and THRILLING WONDER STORIES. We don't know where you can get a copy today since the publishing company is no more.

Your distaste for any story which is not "real" causes us to wonder what on earth you get out of science fiction—since its purpose is actually to make the incredible plausible. But that is your own lookout and we are glad you do read the stuff.

WHO'S PATHETIC?
by Carolyn Duty

Dear Editor: May I congratulate you on a grand January issue. THE BLUE FLAMINGO was beautiful, poignant and bathetic. Only the cover was nerve-wracking—as a student of art may I say that I've never heard of a woman made of carelessly stacked concrete blocks, but that girl was a good example! She looked as if she had just eaten an unripe persimmon.

I didn't particularly see the "humor" in GUARANTEED. Maybe I'm dense but wasn't that story about on the age-level of Wigodsky? Can't you politely shoot some of these poets? If it continues you'll have an ironclad case of justifiable homicide.

Poor Burgess—he's a case of pure misunderstood idiocy. Poor fellow! Please tell Wigodsky that Merritt is spelled with two T's. His spelling is awful.

Do you honestly believe that Man is a lower being. IN THE BLUE FLAMINGO it says that Man is not the ultimate creation. How come then that we have not heard you expounding on theories of Homo Superior et cetera? Personally I see how no one could reach higher mental heights than Joe Kennedy. The man's a mental paragon. **—Oakhurst, Route No. 2, Rogers, Arkansas.**

Well, Carolyn, it's like this—that January cover girl was definitely not carelessly stacked regardless of the concrete and unripe persimmon possibilities. Both of them seem perfectly possible to us.

We thought GUARANTEED was cute and still do, much as we despise the word—cute, that is. Thanks for the idea for an editorial. We've been planning to lambast those smug egocentrics who consider themselves the marvels of creation for some time.

You could be right about Joe Kennedy too, though paradox might fit him better than paragon.

MORON-BOO
by Sam Bolker

Dear Ed: Can an SF fan from way back drop in and make his initial appearance in your mag? At the risk of running into a meteor swarm of BBs (BrickBats), I contend that TEV is deteriorating, but stealthily.

At its present stage of evolution, the Wigburg-clemleroy period, TEV is but a convenient medium wherein a clique of epistlemongers are vieing at ever lower depths each issue, hurling inane sillyisms at each other. This is of course highly entertaining to morons, myself not excepted, but even morons become supersaturated.

Even as SFPTTB . . . (Society for Protesting This, That, Blah. . . .) and Xeno guzzlers—including that notorious Sarge Saturn—have been banished to some far-off galaxy by the SF Security Council, a like disposition awaits this "Period," putrid poetry included. We have so ordained.

Turning from fact to fiction we find another instance in a long line of standard fairy tales, the "Blue Flamango," pool, bird, stairway, unhappy supergal, et al. But I suppose for many of us, the childish fascination for fairy tales still lurks in our subconscious (hear, Freud); and the Editor undoubtedly knows it. Far from top-notch Science Fiction this novel is good for its type, having a fair smattering of science, interesting characters, and above all is well written.

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And that incidentally is where modern SF has come a long way in contrast to a typical oldie, "Conquest of Two Worlds", a jerkily written news account. For after all what good the plot, imagination, or science if a story doesn't make good reading? At this point I would like to say I have yet to read an uninteresting novel in SS, and I've read every issue.

Short Stories: I can't fairly comment on these since I don't care for short stories in any field and can't see how a Scientishort could possibly be developed properly.

Art: I'm strictly on Bergey's bandwagon.

I close with a plea for longer novels, more science and a factual science department or feature.—**3320 Calvert, Detroit 6, Mich.**

Just when we had double shotted both barrels and were squeezing the triggers, you had to go and sweet-talk us at the bottom of paragraph four. It shouldn't happen to a whole kennelful of canines, much less to a hard-working science fiction editor.

All in all, thanks for the opinions, pro and con. Very crisp and well expressed. Don't be afraid to write again. After all, you're only Jung once you know.

YEAH, WE RUN 'EM AND THEY RUN US

by Bill Groover

Dear Editor: Last Friday I went to the drugstore and what do ya know! Yep! Ole **STARTLING** peering out of non s-f stuff. *Holding it at arm's length* I vewed the cover. **Wow**! Some babe! An' look at all the pritty colors. What happened to her? Get hit by a rainbow or run thru a paint factory too fast?

Stories? You mean you run stories besides that lovely blab department. I kinda liked the Hannes Bok story but the rest should have been hit by the atomic bomb.

My girl friend and I got together the other night so I try to convert her to a science-fiction fan but what happens? She leaves me flat. I talk about the fine literary value(?) and the wealth of info in these, or rather under, these lurid covers. I talk of all the feuds an' everything I can think of. So the problem is this; how does one go about converting another to s-f—or does one get another girl?

NOW for Weber! Just who does he think he is! Possibly a Neanderthal who is bored with existence and thinks everyone (except himself of course) is dull and uninteresting just because he has the nerve to tell the editor what he thinks of the mag. I would like to ask him what he thinks a good letter is.—**113 North Porter, Saginaw, Michigan.**

Temper, temper, Bill. Take ten deep breaths and relax. As to your missionary trouble with your alleged girl, there seems to be an increasing number of femme fans in the field.

HE WHO GOT CUSSED

by Wilkie Conner

Dear Editor: This is the second time I've wrote (written?) this letter. Missplaced the other one . . .

[*Turn page*]

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after stamping the envelope. Don't mind re-writing the letter, but sure do hate losing the stamp.

Don't faint, but I like E. E. Evans' little short! I know most of the fen will cuss it, but I just couldn't help enjoying it. Of course, one could hardly call it a story—that is, in the accepted magazine-formula-type sense. More of an anecdote. And the ending was quite obvious. But it was, well, **refreshing.** Maybe you should run more of these short-shorts. Might be a good idea for a contest: How short can a story be and still be a story? Not an incident, but a story? Anyway, let's have something else from EEE, be it long or short. The lad shows promise.

I see quiet a few people agreed with me anent Kuttner, Even old Ross "Fire-ball" Burgess . . . and that lad usually disagrees just for the !&*&%$# of it. I didn't have as good luck when I praised Hank to the skies in a fanzine. I compared him to the late Merritt, and did I get cussed!

I wish **Startling** and **Thrilling Wonder** could go monthly. 1947 saw a great improvement in **quality.** Let us hope that '48 will bring an improvement in **quantity.** Maybe the "high brass" could be talked into it.

Wonder if I could start an argument . . . hmmm . . . I could say Finlay was rank . . . but I like his work to well . . . I could cuss Lawrence . . . but I like his work, too. I know, I'll just say, "Bergy's cover this month was good. . . ." And I mean it. That oughtta bring 'em!—**Box 2392, West Gastonia, N. C.**

Well, Wilkie, you got your quantity anyway. So the gauge of battle is down anent KUTTNER-MERRITT. We'll sit this one out, girls, if you don't mind. A fifty-yard-line box is too good a spot to watch the conflict. Frankly, we like both authors and consider comparisons odious. But go to it by all means if you must.

VA KHOSETH YAGA YOURSELF!
by Gene A. Hyde

Dear Editor: To begin with I'll start at the beginning and get the stories out of the way. The lead novel was very good, although not up to others which you printed during the past year. It was nicely written and held my attention throughout which, in my opinion, is the factor which makes or breaks a story. I have only one other thing to say, **"Va khoseth yaga".**

The HoF was also good when compared to other stories of the same period. It is my opinion that you can't really compare the new with the old and say that the new is better because it is new. After all, the old was new once too.

"Aleph Sub One" was, I think, the best of the Oona and Jick stories. The more I read St. Clair, the more I like her. "Ultra Evolution" was very well done, and perfectly logical if you stop to think about it. The last short was quite a surprise and that's enough said about it. I kinda liked it though.

And now a few remarks on TEV, to wit:

B. Lee Randolph: I'm only nine and I can use words like apostrophize.

Fred Ross Burgess: Re your comment on Merritt—shake Brother!

Thomas and Potts: If I were you two guys, I'd sue the Editor for that misprint.

Editor: You know I'm only kidding.

Wally Weber: I give up. Why was it there?

Jerri Bullock: Don't worry, you'll get used to seeing your name in print.

Lin Carter: Agree on ERB, but only on his ability to create alien atmosphere.

Peter W. Trappan: Captain Future is terrible. (Just my opinion you understand).

Marion Zimmer: Congratulations! But what's with this Astra deal?

I am looking forward to next issue's HoF. I hope it lives up to my expectations. I also hope that Bergey's "symbolic period" lasts for awhile.

And now I must say so-long to all you lovely people. So-long.—**915 North Main St., Bloomington, Ill.**

Hey, that was quite a misprint at that, Gene. We hadn't noticed it previously. It seems the printer's eye wandered to Bergey's cover or something while he was doing his linotype stuff and before he knew it the heading of the under letter got into the body of the upper one and the missing lines from the upper one got into the forefront of the under one. And we feel like a soft-shelled bagel or a pretzel or something after all that. Phew!

CLOYINGLY CUTE
by L. L. Shepherd

Dear Editor: I have finally managed to tear myself away from Bergey's cover on the January ish and got inside to the first story. All I have to say about it is: just wait until I find an old abandoned stairway. I sure hope it is strong because I'm gonna climb it.

I betcha Hannes Bok, went and made the whole thing up though and there just isn't any such place. It was a pretty swell story. Over all, that is. Well, the stairway went up! It musta been over-all!

Now I have arrived at the second story. Lessee, it's by, . . . Ohhhh No! I'll shut my eyes; maybe it'll go away! Nope! It's still there! Well, I don't have to read it anyway. If it's by St. Clair it's about Oona. And, if it's about Oona, it's out!

All the rest of the stories were in the usual SS classification. That is very good. Or didn't you know?

Guaranteed was cute. Why couldn't I have thought up such a simple little idea as that?

Now for TEV: The first thing I will say about it will be general. Generally it's good, that is. However, (HOWEVER, . . . I just love that word) some of the letters strongly remind me of an old saying. You remember, "It takes all kinds to make a world," don'cha Ed? Perhaps, I should add: "And an Editor hears from them all." What am I doing here, didcha say? Well, I said "it takes all kinds," didn't I?

I want to hurry and add my agreement to my neighbor's remarks on Robyn leRoy. (Dan Mulcahy, that is.) I don't spend hours on his letters, Dan. I just pass them up altogether. You know out here in the big wide-open West . . . Huh? Middle-west, then? Not that either—? Alright, close to the East-bank of the Mississippi, and as far apart as Fans are around here . . . OK?

The sixty-five miles to Mulcahy and the hundred miles to Hyde, (I see he has moved again, closer too.) makes me think they are practically next door and I feel almost chummy with them. Why don't you write boys? My wife's not jealous. Especially of boys and girls—under twelve and over sixty.

Professor Editor Sir: What is a reverse-lapeled mutant? Huh? Tell me, huh? Won'tcha please What is one, huh? Awww please?

Lin Carter: I love that fellow's style.

General again: How the boys and girls think up the verse is a big enough mystery; but how you think up enough to match 'em all is a bigger one. How about letting us Pilgrims in on it? Are you a poet in disguise?

You know what? My wife is going to buy me a sub to SS and TWS, for Xmas. Isn't that nice of her?—**204 East Ryder St., Litchfield, Illinois.**

We wear no visible disguise, are no poet and a reverse-lapeled mutant is a sport that wears its bustle before instead of behind. It certainly does take all kinds.

Which brings us to the finish line again. So, as our plane takes off into the setting sun (nothing ever hatches around here) we bid you all a fond adieu until once again our ship drops landing gear to touch upon these favored shores.

Or, in non-travelogue English of sorts, so long until next time, all of you.

—THE EDITOR.

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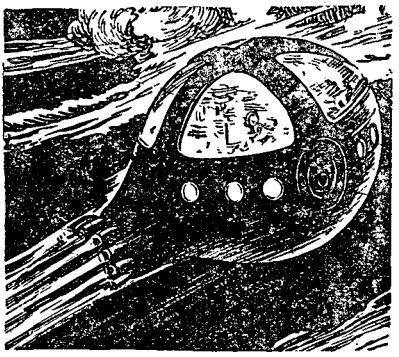
REVIEW OF THE SCIENCE FICTION FAN PUBLICATIONS

MOST interesting newcomer to reach this reviewer of late comes from far away—Sydney, Australia, to be precise—and is entitled THE SYDNEY FUTURIAN. Two issues of this neat, little four-page magazine have reached us and reveal an interesting list of stf activities down under.

Published monthly for the Futurian Society of Sydney by Vol Molesworth, 160



Beach Street, Coogee, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia, its price to Americans is six issues in return for one prozine. It assures exchange with other fanzines and deadlines on the first of every month.

Despite the limitations of THE SYDNEY FUTURIAN to date, it is bright and alive and indicative of an expanding interest in stf on the island continent. Maybe some of you Americans, Canadians and Englishmen who read this column will care to get in touch with Mr. Molesworth et al.

Two announcements of new fanzines have reached us though the magazines have not as yet. They are ECITON, to be put out by S. Vernon McDaniel at 1010 Garcia Road, Santa Barbara, California, whenever material warrants. Furthermore he seems to have a new idea which may work.

His plan is to have fans who find themselves unable to print entire 'zines, print one, two or three (three given to fiction only) pages. In return for a 5c fee per quarter to pay for stapling, postage, et cetera, he will receive a copy of the 'zine containing his material free. Outsiders pay 10c.

[*Turn page*]

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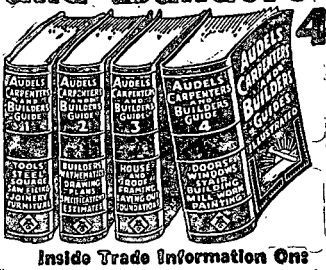

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Meanwhile Gerry de la Ree and Geneviève K. Stephens are planning to bring out a 20-page mimeographed 'zine of prose and poetry entitled LOKI. The magazine will be free and fans wishing to be on the subscription list or to submit prose material or artwork are asked to write Mr. de la Ree at 9 Bogert Place, Westwood, New Jersey. Submitters of poetry are asked to communicate with Miss Stephens on Route #5, St. Johns, Michigan.

Meanwhile, if belatedly, two reports on the Philcon (Philadelphia World Science Fiction Convention) last Labor Day weekend have come in. One, SPARX, was put out by Henry M. Spelman III, Leverett House E-21, Cambridge 38, Massachusetts, and contains an interesting picture display of the convention as well as material, general and specific, by Paul Carter, Tim Orrok, Alpaugh & Kennedy, Vincent Williams and Mr. Spelman III.

The other, THE PHILCON REPORT, is put out by FANTASY-TIMES, Mr. James V. Taurasi of 101-02 Northern Boulevard, Corona, New York, and is a special issue of that estimable fanews magazine. The entire issue, which was mailed free to subscribers, is taken up with the Philcon, giving a complete report.

Harley Sachs, of 208½ South Michigan Street, South Bend 11, Indiana, has come up with a midget sized, completely photographs 'zine entitled FOTOSTEF. For its five pages, which contain printed matter by Tom Jewett and Howard G. Allen, as well as a number of cartoons and photographic novelties, Mr. Sachs is asking 15c, which strikes us as a trifle high considering the slender content.

However, we wish him luck, if only for trying something new.

Now to get on with the A-list, which continues to boom. All in all, this seems to be a very good month for the fanzines, which have both quantity and quality. But let's be at it. First on the list of the chosen is—

ASTRONAUT, 514 West Vienna Avenue, Milwaukee 12, Wisconsin. Editors, Robert L. Stein & Redd Boggs. Published irregularly. 10c per copy, 3 copies 25c.

With Assistant Editor Tom Jewett putting out the first issue. the editors have given us a first-class 'zine. John Speare, Arthur Joquel II, Rick Sneary and the editors contribute provocative material, with Speare taking the lead from an article by Sprague de Campon on the 2,000-year delay in the onset of the Industrial Revolution due to lack of Sociological preparation. Fine stuff.

CANADIAN FANDOM, Philcon Issue, 118 St. George Street, Toronto 5, Ontario. Editor, Beak

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Taylor. Published irregularly. 10c per copy, 3 copies 25c.

The Ontario lads, with next year's Toronto Convention (Torcon) already in preparation, have put out another fat fanzine, with Beak Taylor making the convention report and other worthwhile stuff by Weaver Wright, Donn Brazier, Les Croutch, Barbara Bovard, Redd Boggs and Lin Carter among others. For us, Donn Brazier's Woollcott-esque spook yarn took top honors.

DREAM QUEST, 495 North Third Street, Banning, California. Editor, Don Wilson. Published irregularly. 10c per copy, 3 copies 25c, 6 for 50c, 13 for $1.00.

A good issue with stuff by Redd Boggs, Roger Graham, Bob Stein, E. E. Evans, Marijane Nutall, Rex Ward and Joe Kennedy—constituting a real all-star fan lineup. Artwork is especially good with Rex Ward opening a series of stf mags past and present with a dissection of SS. This book is really on the upgrade.

FANDOM SPEAKS, 6310 Madison Road, Cincinnati 27, Ohio. Editor, Jack Clements, Published monthly. 10c per copy.

The self-styled and able if sloppily printed successor to VOM has broken out in a rash of controversies with fans taking sides in special messages on all sorts of questions and acting as if they meant it. It's amusing but a trifle painful too.

FANEWS, 1443 Fourth Avenue South, Fargo, North Dakota. Editor, Walt Dunkelberger. Published irregularly. 3c per copy, 40 copies $1.00.

Still the best of the news-zines, although a certain uncertainty has been apparent in recent issues as Editor Dunkelberger experiments with a radically changed format. On the whole we like the "shape of things" as they are coming and the contents remain as brightly informative as ever.

FANTASY ADVERTISER, 643 South Bixel Street, Los Angeles 14, California. Editor, Gus Willmorth. Published bi-monthly. 50c per year, 2/6 in England.

Cartoons, weird drawings and articles anent stf and fantasy and its figures are sprinkled liberally between pages of neatly mimeographed advertisements from dealers and others who have "classics" for sale. Almost a must for the fancollector.

FANTASY ASPECTS, 584 East Monroe Street, Little Falls, New York. Editor, unlisted. Published irregularly. 15c per copy (5c to NEFF members).

[*Turn page*]

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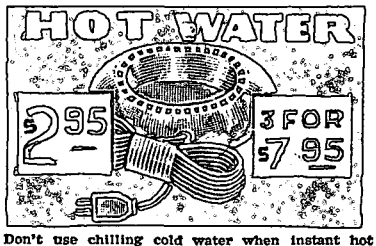

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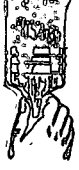

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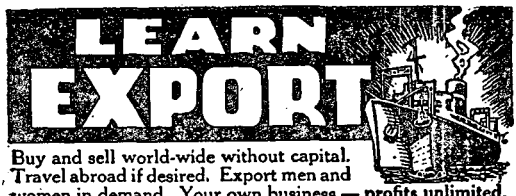

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Another all-star fancollection, listing Ackerman, Jewett, Tucker, Tom Gardner, Harry Warner Jr., James Blish, Cheney, Orrok, A. B. Chandler and Chandler Davis. Blish and Chandler especially are in good form. As for Phil Confan we'd still like to know the identity of the fan who pulled that query. A beaut!

FANTASY COMMENTATOR, 19 East 235th Street, New York 66, N. Y. Editor, A. Langley Searles. Published quarterly. 25c per copy, 5 copies $1.00.

What has become a standby for serious fandom—this time, along with the immortal Moskowitz and the ninth installment of his history of stf, it contains articles by James Warren Thomas, Darrell Richardson and William H. Evans, excellent and thoughtful book reviews, a good editorial dealing with current stf-issues and other features. Thomas' piece on the Gothic Novel and Percy B. Shelley seemed to us especially interesting.

FANTASY REVIEW, issues 5 & 6, 115 Wanstead Park Road, Ilford, Essex. Editor, Walter Gillings. Published bi-monthly. 75c per year, 5/6 in England, 15c per copy.

Though Gillings still relies heavily upon American fandom to keep his magazine filled up, his choice of authors and subjects is excellent and his own gossip columns (there are several), as well as good book reviews, continue to make his book the brightest thing for stf England since the war. More power to him.

FANTASY TIMES, 101-02 Northern Boulevard, Corona, New York. Editor, James V. Taurasi. Publishesd monthly. 10c per issue, 3 issues 25c, $1.00 per year.

Combination fanewzine and swapsters' paradise which seems, like FANDOM SPEAKS and to a lesser extent FANEWS, to have become increasingly entangled in the controversies currently raging amid science fiction fans. Otherwise FT is newsy, competently printed and is packed with plenty of reviews of stf subjects, past and present.

LUNACY, 1115 San Anselmo Avenue, San Anselmo, California. Editor, George Cockroft. Published irregularly. 5c per copy.

A sudden upsurge of the artwork (mostly by George & Gordon Cockroft) had as much as another one factor to do with bringing this perennial B-lister upstairs. It is still brash and irksomely fresh at times—at others extremely amusing. Rick Sneary (who edited him?) digs up a few old vampires.

THE FANSCIENT, 3435 NE 38th Avenue, Portland 13, Oregon. Editor, Donald B. Day. Published quarterly. 15c per copy, 50c per year.

An original by the de Courcys highlights the second

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issue of this smart little magazine, along with an autobiographical profile by Edmond Hamilton, who confesses to 25 years of pounding a typewriter along the stf trails. Artwork runs from bad to excellent and is never dull.

THE GORGON, 4936 Grove Street, Denver 11, Colorado. Editor, Stanley Mullen. Published irregularly. 15c per copy, 75c per year.

Mr. Mullen continues to publish one of the most impressive fanzines of recent years, featuring superb fanpoetry and artwork. He too includes a self-written account of the Philcon and tees off in the book review effectively. Donn Brazier conjures up an atomic warning and Phil Rasch comments on the work of the late A. Merritt. But it's the verse and artwork that makes this one special.

THE KAY-MAR TRADER, 1028 Third Avenue South, Moorhead, Minnesota. Editor, K. Martin Carlson. Published irregularly. 5c per copy.

Still a worthy nickel's worth for the fancollector, containing as it does national and international swap lists and pages of research on complete works of some of the most famous stfauthors.

THE VORTEX, 70 Mirabel Avenue, San Francisco 10, California. Editors, Gordon M. Kull & George R. Cowie. Last issue. 25c per copy.

It seems a shame that this so-highly promising of fanzines should fold its tents silently or otherwise and announce suspension after just two issues. While its format is not quite as impressive as was that of the sole preceding edition, the editorial lineup is

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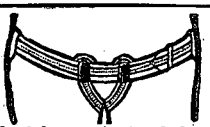

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much better, what with E. E. Evans, Ackerman, Colonel Keller, Clark Ashton Smith, Stanley Mullen, Jim Taurasi and the editors contributing worthily. We'll keep our fingers crossed for the future of THE VORTEX.

TYMPANI, 2215 Benjamin Street NE, Minneapolis 18, Minnesota. Editors, Redd Boggs & R. L. Stein. Published bi-weekly. 5c per copy, 6 copies 25c. 12 copies $1.00.

Another news and reviews magazine which has been showing steady improvement—enough to rate the A-list this time. Plenty of swapads and letters as well.

And now to turn to more melancholy matters—namely the B-list members. First to receive the stigmatic accolade is—

A FORUM ON THE SUBJECT OF THE NECESSITY OF INTERPLANETARY FLIGHTS, composed of Howard A. Lewis, Fred Ross Burgess. Published by Scarab Press. The gentlemen listed agree that space flight would be beneficial to humanity in a brash, sometimes amusing and never harmful symposium.

FANMAG, 813 Eastern Avenue, Connersville, Indiana. Editor, Ray C. Higgs. Published quarterly. No price listed. Short takes by some well-known fanauthors here, including John Cockroft, Monroe Kuttner. Al Budrys and Redd Boggs—but somehow this reader derived an impression of haste, one which was not lessened by the ghastly artwork of Cockroft and Editor Higgs. A should-be A whose first issue didn't pan out.

OPERATION FANTAST, Riverside, South Brink, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire England. Editor, Captain Kenneth F. Slater. Published irregularly. Free to British Fantasy League members. No price listed. Captain Slater insists his is the only British Ham-Fanzine and pretty well makes good in his premise in highly amusing fashion. Charles Duncombe causes shudders as he reveals the fate of the fan who read too many prozines and that of the girl who goes out with a literal wolf, as penned by Nigel Lindsay is good fun. A little better printing would make it an A.

RAY'S RAVIN'S, 813 Eastern Avenue, Connersville, Indiana. Editor, Ray C. Higgs. First issue. No price listed. Well, we don't quite know what it's all about but we'll give Ray an A for Effort on his title at any rate. He does.

SHANGRI L'AFFAIRES, 1057 South Normandie Avenue, Los Angeles 6, California. Editor, Charles Burbee. Published irregularly. 10c per copy, 3 copies 25c. Something has gone out of this, the so-long amusing bi-monthly recording vehicle of the ideas and doings of the LASFS. Despite a fine essay by A. E. van Vogt, it rates the B-list for the first time. Editor Burbee announces his retirement from the editorial post against a mimeographed chorus of feuding voices. LASFS, where are you going?

SNIX, P. O. Box #6, Helena, Montana. Editor, Walter A. Coslet. Published irregularly. 4 copies 25c outside FAPA. Rather well-gagged up little 'zine which contains an interesting record of British prozine sales amidst a welter of snix, which are apparently

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some sort of foo or super whost. Something terrible, however, must have happened to the cover. It is virtually invisible.

SPACEWARP, November and December, 1947, issue. 2120 Bay Street, Saginaw, Michigan. Editor, Arthur H. Rapp. Printed irregularly. 10c per copy, 3 copies 25c. Both issues contain much of merit, what with contributions from Wilkie Connor, Rap, Bill Groover, Ackerman, Al Lopez, Rue Bowdoin, Genevieve Stephens and Jack Clements among others. But artwork and printing are pretty tough to take. Sorry.

'TATOR, P. O. Box # 6, Helena, Montana. Editor, Walter A. Coslet. Published irregularly. 3c per copy, 2 copies 5c. Mostly a review of the British prozine NEW WORLDS, which—'TATOR, that is—has the earmarks of a one-shot. Humor a bit forced but okay when editor plays it straight.

THE NATIONAL FANTASY FAN, 813 Eastern Avenue, Connersville, Indiana. Editor Ray C. Higgs. Published twice monthly. No price listed. The election issue of the National Fantasy Fan Federation (*NEFF*), which is a nice job but too involved with NEFF doings, nominations, treasurer's report and the like to have much general interest.

THE ROCKET NEWS LETTER, 91 Pine Street, Riverside, Illinois. Editors, Wayne Proell & George Whittington. Published monthly. 10c per copy or $1.00 per year. The journal of the Chicago Rocket Society, in highly simple form which, like the NATIONAL FANTASY FAN is largely pre-occupied (as it should be) with Society doings. George Whittington, however, has come up with a well-conceived report on an imaginary flight to the moon.

Well, that's it and not bad—not bad at all. We enjoyed reading them as well as the privilege of doing so. Please keep them coming our way for review.

—THE EDITOR.

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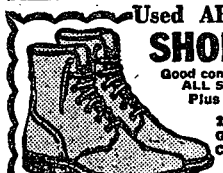

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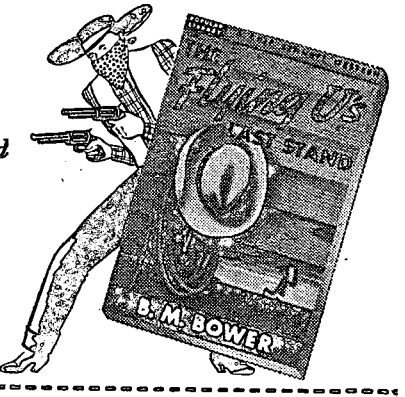

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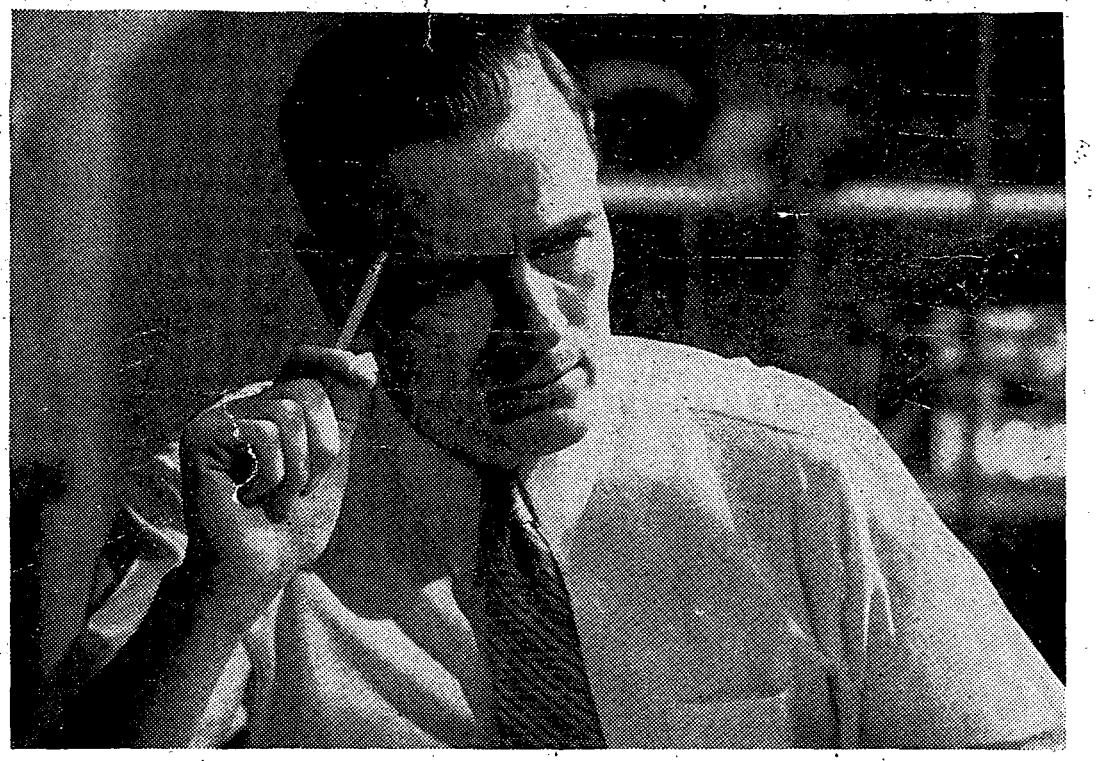

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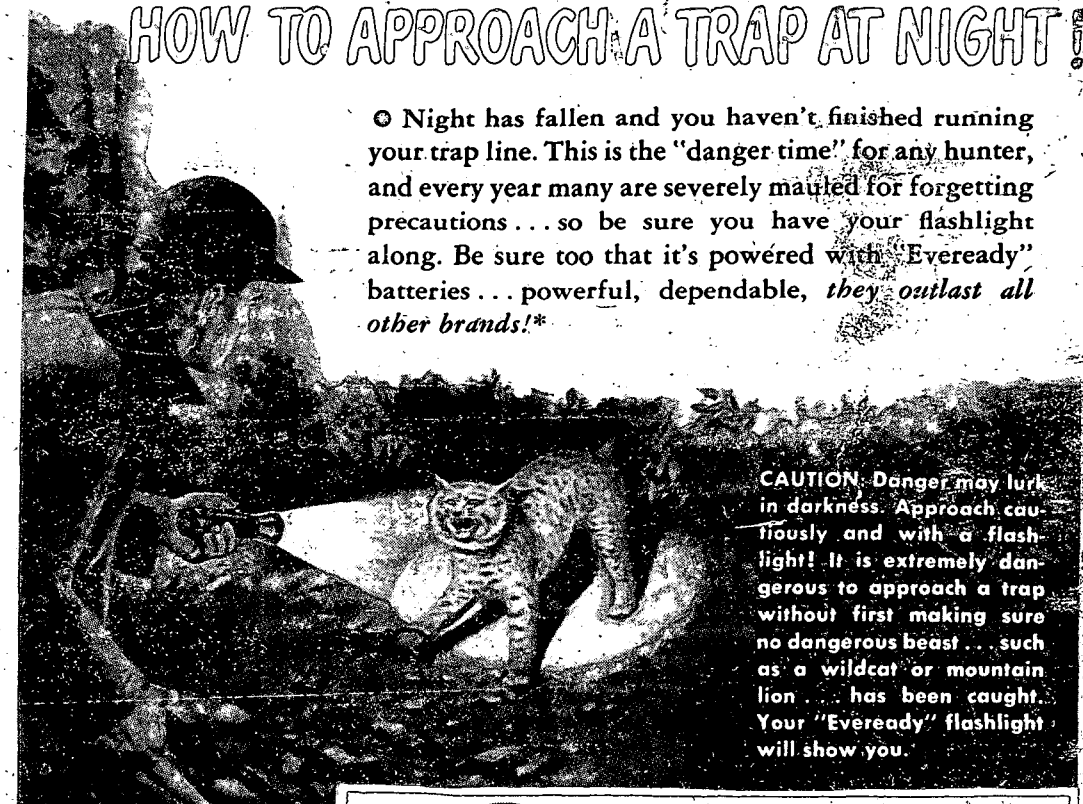
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